





LIBRARY  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF ILLINOIS

823  
C914ch  
v.1

The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.

To renew call Telephone Center, 333-8400

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

FEB 7 1980

FEB 7 1980

FEB 14 1984

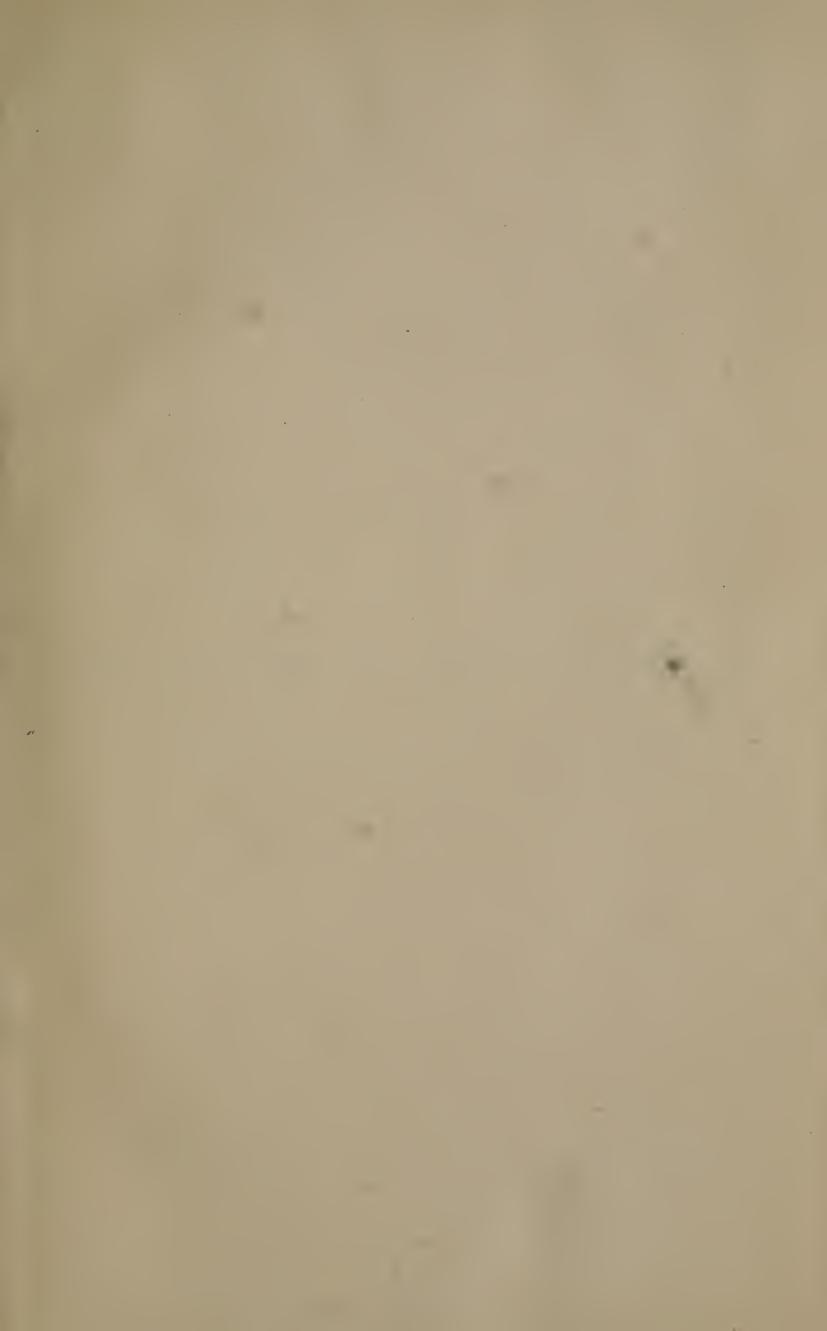
FEB 10 1985

by the young  
element coming down

7/2

about 4-50

with





CHRONICLES OF DUSTYPORE





# CHRONICLES *of* DUSTYPORE

A TALE OF  
MODERN ANGLO-INDIAN SOCIETY

*G. S. H. ...*

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'WHEAT AND TARES' 'LATE LAURELS'

ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON  
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1875

[*All rights reserved*]



823

C914 ch

v.1

# CONTENTS

OF

## THE FIRST VOLUME.



SEARCHY

1954

JAN 8

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE SANDY TRACTS . . . . .	1
II. MAUD . . . . .	16
III. WAR AT THE SALT BOARD . . . . .	36
IV. FELICIA . . . . .	46
V. 'SUTTON'S FLYERS'. . . . .	61
VI. 'A COMPETITION WALLAH.' . . . .	74
VII. THE RUMBLE CHUNDER GRANT . . . . .	93
VIII. GOLDEN DAYS . . . . .	101
IX. THE FIRST BALL . . . . .	114
X. THE WOES OF A CHAPERON . . . . .	131
XI. FRIENDS IN COUNCIL . . . . .	145

*Jan 200 1954  
19 Aug 52  
Chamber 205*

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. A CHAPTER OF DISCLOSURES . . . . .	170
XIII. DESVCEUX MAKES THE RUNNING . . . . .	180
XIV. TO THE HILLS! . . . . .	197
XV. A DISTRICT OFFICER . . . . .	221
XVI. ELYSIUM . . . . .	230
XVII. A BATTLE ROYAL . . . . .	245
XVIII. GAUDIA IN EXCELSIS . . . . .	256
XIX. A BRUSH ON THE FRONTIER . . . . .	277
XX. A LAST RIDE . . . . .	292

# CHRONICLES OF DUSTYPORE.<sup>1</sup>

---

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SANDY TRACTS.

He seems like one whose footsteps halt,  
Toiling in immeasurable sand ;  
And o'er a weary, sultry land,  
Far beneath a blazing vault,  
Sown in a wrinkle of the monstrous hill,  
The city sparkles like a grain of salt.

ANYONE who knows or cares anything about India—that is, say, one Englishman in a hundred thousand—is familiar with the train of events which resulted in the conquest of the Sandy Tracts, the incorporation of that unattractive region in the British Indian

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of readers who might mispronounce the name of the famous station Dastypúr if the official spelling were retained, the name is spelt phonetically.

Empire, and the establishment of an Agency at Dustypore. The ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine who neither know nor wish to know would not be grateful for an account of battles fought at places of which they never heard, of victories gained by generals whose fame is already forgotten, and of negotiations which nobody but the negotiators understood at the time, and which a few years have effectually relegated to the oblivion that awaits all that is at once dull, profitless, and unintelligible.

Suffice it to say that the generally admired air of 'Rule Britannia,' which has been performed on so many occasions for the benefit of admiring audiences in different parts of the Indian continent, was once again piped and drummed and cannonaded into the ears of a prostrate population. The resistless

'red line,' historical on a hundred battle-fields, once again stood firm against the onset of despairing fanaticism, and once again in its advance moved forward the boundaries of the conquering race. The solid tramp of British soldiers' feet sounded the death-knell of a rule whose hour of doom had struck, and one more little tyranny—its cup of crime, perfidy, and folly full—was blotted for ever from the page of the world's story. The sun set into a horizon lurid with the dust of a flying rabble, and the victorious cavalry, as it returned, covered with sweat and dirt, from the pursuit, found all the fighting done, an English guard on duty at the city-gates, a troop of English artillery drawn up in front of the principal mosque, and a couple of English sentineis plodding up and down with all the stolidity

of true Britons in front of the Officers' Quarters. The Sandy Tracts were ours.

The next morning at sunrise the British flag was flying on the Fort of Dustypore, and a British General and his staff were busy with maps, orders, and despatches in quarters from which the ladies of a royal seraglio had fled in post-haste the afternoon before. Thenceforward everything went on like clockwork. Before the week was out order, such as had not been dreamed of for many a long year, prevailed in every nook and corner of the captured city. One morning an elderly gentleman, in plain clothes, attended by two or three uniformed lads and a tiny cavalry escort, rode in, and a roar of cannon from the Fort announced that the 'Agent' had arrived. Then set in the full tide of civil administration. Courts began to



sit, pickpockets and brawlers were tried, sanitary regulations were issued, returns were called for, appointments were made. The 'Dustypore Gazette,' on its first issue, announced with the greatest calmness, and in the curt language appropriate to an everyday occurrence, the annexation of the Sandy Tracts ; and a gun fired from the Fort every morning, as near as might be to mid-day, announced to the good people of Dustypore that, by order of Queen Victoria, it was twelve o'clock in a British cantonment.

The new addition to Her Majesty's possessions resembled the Miltonic hell in one particular, at any rate—in being a region of fierce extremes. On winter mornings a biting wind, fresh from its icy home in the distant snow-clad range, cut one to the core ; and people clustered, with chattering teeth

and blue fingers, round blazing hearths, where great logs worthy of an English Christmas tempered the cruel atmosphere to a genial glow. When the 'rains' came it poured a little deluge. During the eight months of summer the state of things resembled that prevailing in the interior of a well-constructed and well-supplied Arnott's stove. Then it was that the Sandy Tracts were seen in the complete development of their resources and in the fullest glory. Vast plains, a dead level, but for an occasional clump of palms or the dome of some despoiled and crumbling tomb, stretched away on every side, and ended in a hazy quivering horizon that spoke of infinite heat. Over these ranged herds of cattle here and there ; browsing on no one could see what ; or lying, panting and contented, in some muddy

pool, with little but horns, eyes, and nostrils exposed above the surface. Little ill-begotten stunted plants worked hard to live and grow and to weather the roaring fierce winds. The crows sat gasping, open-beaked, as if protesting against having been born into so sulphurous an existence. Here and there a well, with its huge lumbering wheel and patient bullocks, went creaking and groaning night and day, as if earth grudged the tiny rivulet, coming so toilfully from her dry breast, and gave it up with sighs of pain. The sky was cloudless, pitiless, brazen. The sun rose into it without a single fleck of vapour to mitigate its fierceness, and pierced, like a red-hot sword, the rash mortal who dared, unprotected, to meet its ray. All day it shone and glistened and blazed, until the very earth seemed to crack

with heat and the mere thought of it was pain. The natives tied their heads up in bags, covered their mouths, and carried their clothes between the sun and themselves. Europeans entrenched themselves behind barriers of moistened grass, lay outstretched under monster fans, and consoled themselves with what cool drinks their means allowed, and with the conviction, which seemed to spring perennial in each sufferer's breast, that the present was by far the hottest summer ever known.

Dew there was none. You stepped from your door in the morning into a bed of sand, which no amount of watering could reduce to the proper solidity of a garden-path. As you came in at night you shook off the dust that had gathered on you in your evening stroll. Miles away the galloping

horseman might be tracked by the little cloud that he stirred up as he went. The weary cattle trudged homeward from their day's work in a sandstorm of their own manufacture. There was sand in the air one breathed, in the food one tried to eat, in the water that pretended to assuage one's thirst : sand in heaven, and sand on earth—and a great deal of sand in the heads of many of the officials.

This getting of sand into the head, and getting it in in a degree compatible neither with health, comfort, or efficiency, was a recognised malady in the Sandy Tracts. It cost the Government a good deal of money, and the services of many a useful brain. Officers, when they felt themselves becoming unendurably sandy, and their ideas proportionately confused, used to take furlough,

and go home, and try to get washed clear again at Malvern or Wiesbaden. There was a famous physician in Mayfair renowned for his skill in ridding the heads of those poor gentlemen of the unwelcome deposit, who made a reputation and a fortune by, so to speak, dredging them.

There was one official head, however, at Dustypore in which no particle of sand was to be found, and that was Mr. Strutt's. It was for this reason, probably, amongst others, that he was made Chief Secretary to the Salt Board, a post which, at the time when this history commences, was one of the most important, responsible, and lucrative in the entire service. For the Salt Board, as will hereafter be seen, was an institution whose dignity and powers had grown and grown until they almost overtopped those of

the Agency itself. If the Salt Board was the embodiment of what was dignified and powerful in Dustypore, Mr. Strutt had concentrated in his own person the functions and attributes of the Board. He was prompt, indefatigable, self-satisfied, and what his superiors valued him for especially, lucky.

A long career had taught him and the world that those who attacked him came off second-best. His answers were unanswerable, his reports effective, his explanations convincing. His nervous hand it was that depicted the early triumphs of the Dustypore Administration, and in sonorous periods set forth the glories of the British rule—the roads, the canals, the hospitals, and schools—the suppression of crime, the decreased mortality, the general passion of the inhabitants for female education. His figures were con-

stantly quoted by people who wished to talk about India to English audiences, and his very name was a pillar of strength to the champions of the English rule. Even his enemies were constrained to admit that he possessed the art of 'putting it' to a degree of fearful and wonderful perfection.

The maxim, 'like master like man,' was as far as possible from being verified in the case of Mr. Strutt and his superiors. Of these Mr. Fotheringham, the Chairman, was lymphatic in temperament, inordinately vain, and the victim of an inveterate habit of enunciating platitudes. Cockshaw, who came next, was off-hand, superficial, and positive—with the positiveness of a man who hates deliberation and despises every form of uncertainty. Blunt, the third member, was a non-civilian, and had been



brought out from England on account of his practical acquaintance with salt-mines, and of his having been a secretary in the Board of Trade. He was business-like, straightforward, and unconciliating; he generally thought differently from his colleagues, and he had the roughest possible manner of saying what he thought.

Such a trio had sometimes, as may well be imagined, no little trouble in preserving toward the outer world the aspect of serene, benevolent, and consistent infallibility, the maintenance of which Fotheringham regarded as the first of duties. Cockshaw did not in the least mind a row, so long as he was not kept too long at office for the purpose of making it. Blunt would have stayed at office till midnight, arguing doggedly, sooner than abandon his point.

Happily Fotheringham had a great sense of propriety, concealed the dissensions of his colleagues from the public eye, and preserved the Board's dignity from ignominious collapse.

Under Strutt came a hierarchy of less important subordinates, who paved the long descent, so to speak, from the official altitudes in which the Salt Board had its being, to the vulgar public who consumed the salt. Chief of these was Vernon, with whom the reader will speedily become better acquainted. Under him, again, came Mr. Whisp, the Assistant-Secretary, a young gentleman whose task it was to draw up minutes of the Board's proceedings, to draft its circulars, and to collect the statistics out of which Strutt concocted his reports. He had thus, it will

be seen, an opportunity of acquiring much useful information, and a highly ornamental style, and Whisp was generally regarded in the service as a rising man.

## CHAPTER II.

MAUD.

Nature said, 'A lovelier flower  
On earth was never sown :  
This child I to myself will take ;  
She shall be mine, and I will make  
A lady of my own.'

WHEN Vernon was appointed Under-Secretary to the Salt Board he no doubt imagined that, in connection with that august body, he would be known to fame, and (as Strutt would grandiloquently have put it) leave his mark on his epoch. He was destined, however, as the reader of these pages will presently perceive, to become remarkable on the less unusual ground of

relationship to an extremely pretty girl. His cousin Maud, of whom years before, in a rash moment of benevolence, he had consented to become guardian and trustee, had been suddenly thrown upon his hands. She was no longer a remote anxiety which could be disposed of by cheques, letters to governesses, and instructions to solicitors, but an immediate, living reality, with a highly effective pair of eyes, good looks—as to which women might cavil, but every man would be a firm believer—the manner of an eager child, and a joyousness which Vernon was obliged to admit was at once deliciously infectious to the world at large, and a very agreeable alterative to the state of mind produced by Indian summers, salt statistics, letters polished by Whisp, or common-places enunciated by Fotheringham. With the timidity

of indolence he shuddered to think of the social entanglements and disturbances which so new an element in his household was calculated to produce.

Maud, on the other hand, had come out to India with a very low opinion of herself and of her claims upon the good-will of society. At Miss Goodenough's establishment for young ladies, where her education had been completed, her shortcomings had been impressed upon her in a manner wholesome, perhaps, and necessary, but decidedly depressing. She had been haunted by the awful consciousness that she was a 'Tom-boy.' Her general demeanour, her mode of expressing herself, her ignorance of many things with which no one ought to be unfamiliar, had been the object of the most unflattering comment. The elder Miss

Goodenough—between whom and Maud there existed a real though somewhat fitful attachment—used to have her into a solemn little chamber and administer the most awful lectures on her shortcomings, and the disgrace and suffering which they would justly entail. These interviews were generally tearful and tender; for Miss Goodenough, to whom Maud had been consigned as a child on her first arrival from India, loved her with a sort of rapture which made itself felt amid all the vehement fault-finding which Maud's delinquencies necessitated. Maud had always regarded the old lady in something of a maternal light, and never could be brought to abandon the familiar abbreviation of 'Goody,' by which she had been allowed, as a child, to address her instructress, and accepted her sentences with

unquestioning faith and submission. The two used to weep together over Maud's shortcomings. She looked upon Miss Goodenough as a friend whose heart it was her unlucky fate to lacerate. Miss Goodenough regarded Maud as a creature whose alarming impulses and irregularities justified the darkest forebodings as to her future, and succeeded in infecting her pupil with some of her own apprehensions. Some judgment must, so both agreed, sooner or later overtake one whose shoulders seemed guided by a hidden law to unequal altitudes, whose toes defied every endeavour to keep them pointed in the conventional direction, and whose impetuous behaviour was constantly producing a scandal of more or less gravity.

‘Dearest child,’ Miss Goodenough would say, with an air of profound commiseration,



‘if you could see how you look, with one shoulder up to your ears and the other near to what should be your waist!’

This taunt particularly grieved Maud, for she felt bitterly that her form was unromantically plump, and not at all of the refined tenuity of several of her companions.

‘My shoulders!’ she would exclaim, with the tears in her eyes; ‘I wish they were both at Jericho. I am sure I am made wrong, dearest Goody, indeed I am.’

‘Then, my dear,’ Miss Goodenough would say, not encouragingly, ‘we should try all the more to remedy natural defects; at any rate, you might know your Bible. Now, dear Maud, your ignorance is, you know, simply shocking.’

‘Yes, I know,’ said Maud, ‘but I can’t help it. Those horrid kings of Israel and

Judah! They made Israel to sin, they make me to sin, indeed they do. Jehoshaphat, Jehoiakim, Jonadab, Jehu—all indeed—all beginning with J—how can anyone remember them?’

‘Then, my dear,’ her inexorable monitress would reply, ‘you can never know what every well-educated young lady, what every mere school-child, is acquainted with. How can you be fit to go into the world?’

‘I wish,’ said Maud, passionately, in despair at the difficulties of existence, ‘that when the tribes got lost they had taken their histories with them, and lost them too. Darling Goody, let me learn texts, hymns, all the Sermon on Mount, as much poetry as you please, only not those dreadful Chronicles!’ Maud used on these occasions to throw her arms round Goody’s

neck in an outbreak of affectionate repentance, in a way that the elder lady, who was absurdly impressionable, found it difficult to resist.

But Miss Goodenough's kindness made Maud's conscience all the less at ease. Calmness, self-restraint, composure, a well-stocked mind, and sensible judgment were, Miss Goodenough told her, the great excellences of character to be aimed at. Maud looked into herself, and felt, with agonies of self-reproach, that in every particular she fell miserably short; that she was the very reverse of calm—the least thing roused her into passion, or sent her spinning from the summit of serene high spirits to the lowest depths of despair. As for self-restraint, Maud felt she was just as capable of it as of flying to the moon.

From time to time she made violent efforts to be diligent, and set to work with sudden zeal upon books which her instructress assured her were most interesting and improving. These attempts, for the most part, collapsed in grievous failure. Improvement, Maud felt ruefully, there might be, though unbeknown to herself; interest she was certain there was none. On the other hand, a chance novel, which had somehow or other passed scatheless through the rigid blockade which Miss Goodenough established around her young ladies, had filled her with a sort of ecstasy of excitement; and no amount of poetry—no such amount, at any rate, as came within the narrow limits of her mistress's literary horizon—seemed capable of fatiguing or even of satisfying her. Displaying the most complete inaptitude for

every other form of diligence, she was ready enough to learn any amount that anyone liked to give her. She even signalled her zeal by the spasmodic transcription of her favourite passages into a precious volume marked with a solemn 'Private,' protected from profane eyes by a golden padlock, and destined by its proprietress to be the depository of all her intellectual treasures.

Miss Goodenough, however, though admitting perforce the merits of the great masters of English song, regarded the claims of poetry as generally subordinate to those of history, geography, arithmetic, and various other branches of useful and ornamental learning, and treated Maud's passion for Sir Walter Scott as but another alarming symptom of an excitable disposition and ill-regulated mind.

A crisis came at last. It happened at church, where Miss Goodenough's young ladies used to sit just under the gallery, while the boys of 'the Crescent House Academy' performed their devotions overhead. One fatal Sunday in February, just as the service was over, and the two Misses Goodenough had already turned their backs to lead the way out, and the young ladies were preparing to follow, a little missive came fluttering down and fell almost into Maud's hands; at any rate, she slipped it into her Prayer-book; and all would have gone well but for that horrid Mademoiselle de Vert, who, turning sharply round, detected the occurrence, and the moment Maud was outside the church demanded her Prayer-book.

Maud turned fiery red in an instant, and surrendered her book.

‘And the note,’ said Mademoiselle de Vert.

‘What note?’ said Maud. But alas! her tell-tale cheeks rendered the question useless, and made all evasion impossible. Maud was speedily driven to open resistance.

‘No, thank you,’ she said, with an air that told Mademoiselle de Vert that further attempts at coercion would be labour thrown away; ‘it was not intended for you; it was a valentine.’

After this appalling disclosure there was, of course, when they got home, an explanation to be had with Miss Goodenough, who professed herself, and probably really was, terrified at so new a phase of human depravity.

Maud was presently in floods of tears, and was obliged to confess that she and the offending culprit had on more than one occa-

sion let each other's eyes meet, had in fact exchanged looks, and even smiles; so that, perhaps, she was the real occasion for this unhallowed act of temerity.

'Forgive me, forgive me!' she cried; 'it was nothing wrong; it was only a heart with an arrow and a Cupid!'

'A Cupid!' cried Miss Goodenough, in horror at each new revelation; 'and some writing too, I suppose?'

'Yes,' said Maud, whose pleasure in the valentine was rapidly surmounting the disgrace into which it had got her; 'really pretty verses. Here it is!' And thereupon she produced the offending billet, and proceeded to read with effusion:—

I would thou wert a summer rose,  
And I a bird to hover o'er thee;  
And from the dawn to evening's close  
To warble only, 'I adore thee!'



‘Stop!’ cried Miss Goodenough, with great decision, and white with indignation; ‘do you know what you are reading? Do you know that that vulgar rubbish is the sort of odious impertinence that shopboys send to their sweethearts, but which it is an insult to let a lady even see, and which, transmitted in a church, is little less than sacrilege?’

So saying, Miss Goodenough took the offending letter and consigned it to the flames, and poor Maud stood ruefully by, watching the conflagration of the silver Cupid, mourning over Miss Goodenough’s hard-heartedness, and consoling herself with the reflection that at any rate she remembered the verses.

‘I must write to your aunt Felicia to remove you. What an example for other girls!’

‘Well,’ said Maud, resignedly, and blushing in anticipation at the thought of such an exposure; ‘do not, at any rate, tell her about the valentine. Dear Goody, did you never have one sent to you when you were my age?’

Miss Goodenough quite declined to gratify this audacious enquiry, and made up her mind that it was high time for Maud to be under more masterful guidance than her own. The result was that in the following November Maud was a passenger on the P. & O. steamship ‘Cockatrice,’ from Southampton to Calcutta, where her cousin Vernon was to meet her and escort her to her new home in Dustypore.

She had been, it must be acknowledged, to a certain degree reassured by the experience of her voyage. She found that

the kings of Israel and Judah did not occupy a prominent place in general conversation; that a precise acquaintance with the queens of England was not expected of her; and that nobody resented the impetuosity of her movements or her want of self-restraint. On the contrary, several of her fellow-voyagers had evinced the liveliest sympathy and interest in her, and had devoted themselves successfully to keeping her amused. Maud, in fact, had gone down to her cabin on more occasions than one during the voyage and shed some tears at the approaching separation from friends, whom even those few weeks of chance companionship had carried close to her heart. It had been in truth a happy time. The captain, to whose special care she was committed, had watched over her with a

more than paternal interest. The doctor insisted on her having champagne. The purser set all his occult influences at work to increase her comfort. The stewards conspired to spoil her. Maud felt that nothing she could do would at all adequately express her feelings to all these good people who had ministered to her wants, and tried, with so much success, to please her. There are people, no doubt, to whom a voyage to India is the height of boredom; but there are other happier natures to whom it presents a continuous series of excitements, interests, and joys. Maud, at any rate, enjoyed it with a sort of rapture, and trembled to think how faintly Miss Goodenough's admonitions even now began to fall upon her conscience's ear.

Then there had been some very charming fellow-passengers on board, with whom

she had formed the warmest friendship. There was a certain Mr. Mowbray, for instance—a comely, curly-pated, beardless boy, on his way to join his regiment—whom she found extremely interesting, and who lost no time in becoming confidential. It was very pleasant to sit on deck through long hazy mornings and play *bésique* with Mr. Mowbray; and pleasant too, when the day was done, to sit with him in the moonlight and watch the Southern Cross slowly wheeling up, and the waves all ablaze with phosphoric splendour, and to talk about home, and Mr. Mowbray's sisters, and the stations to which each of them were bound, never, probably, to meet again. There was something mysterious about it, Maud felt, and impressive, and very, very charming.

And then, on some evenings, the

stewardess would declare that Maud looked pale, or had a headache, and that she should have a little dinner on deck. 'Just a bit of chicken, miss,' this benevolent being would say, 'and a slice of ham, and the doctor will give you a glass of champagne. The cabin is a deal too hot for you.' And then, by some happy fatality, Mr. Mowbray would also have a headache that very afternoon, and nothing but dining on deck would do for him; and so there would be a very pleasant little repast going on over the heads of the hot, noisy crowd who were gobbling up their food below; and the two invalids would forget their maladies, fancied or real, in the innocent excitement of a congenial *tête-à-tête*. On the whole, Maud had arrived at Dustypore with the conviction that existence, though beset with almost innumerable diffi-

culties and dangers, was replete with enjoyments, which made it, despite every drawback, most thoroughly well worth while to be alive.

## CHAPTER III.

## WAR AT THE SALT BOARD.

Hos motus animorum atque hæc certamina tanta.

THE Salt Board had excessively respectable traditions. Its commencement dated far back in Indian history, long before the conquest of the Sandy Tracts, and its *prestige* had been maintained by a series of officials all of whom had been in the habit of speaking of one another with the utmost respect. The 'illustrious Jones,' the 'great administrator Brown,' the 'sagacious and statesmanlike Robinson,' all threw the lustre of their abilities over the institution, and



were appealed to with unhesitating faith by their successors in the department. When one member referred to another he spoke of himself as 'sitting at his feet,' or as 'formed in his school,' or as 'guided by his principles,' in language that was perhaps a little unnecessarily grandiloquent, but which had, at any rate, the effect of investing the Board with a sort of moral grandeur with the uninitiated. Even the mistakes of the Board acquired a sort of dignity, and were not to be spoken of in an off-hand or irreverential manner. They might seem mistakes, but it was not prudent to be too sure that they were so. Many other decisions of the Board had been cavilled at by rash critics, and time had shown their wisdom. The Board, moreover, had a certain grand, misty way of its own of talking, that made its proceedings

somewhat hard to criticise. Indeed, all outside criticism was resented as an impertinence, and those rash critics who had the temerity to attempt it were put down with the contemptuous decisiveness appropriate to ill-judged advisers. There was a regular conventional way of crushing them: first it was contended that, being outsiders, they could not, in the nature of things, understand the matter—as if there was a sort of inner and spiritual sense, by which the affairs of the Salt Board must be apprehended. Then there were stereotype phrases, which really meant nothing, but which were understood and accepted in the Sandy Tracts as implying that the Board considered the subject disposed of, and did not want further discussion. Arguments which could not be otherwise met were smothered in an array of big

names, or parried by pathetic references to the zeal of the Salt officials, and the conscientious manner in which they worked in the sun. Whatever line was adopted, it was the invariable tradition that Government should express its concurrence, and so all ended comfortably to all parties concerned. All this was naturally regarded as being highly satisfactory. But the maintenance of this agreeable equilibrium depended on the persons concerned being tempered of the right metal, imbued with the right spirit, and what Strutt used to call 'loyal.' The intrusion of an alien spirit could not fail to produce deplorable disturbance, disquiet, and the dissipation of all sorts of agreeable illusions ; and this was what happened when Blunt—who was an outsider, the hardest, roughest, most matter-of-fact of commercial

Englishmen—was appointed to the Board. Blunt violated every tradition in the most ruthless fashion, was unimpressed by all the solemnities which awed conventional beholders, and had the most inconvenient way of asking what things meant, and on (as he used to say, with a sort of horrid glee) ‘picking the heart of a thing.’ Now, the Board did not at all relish having its heart picked out in this unceremonious fashion, and resented it with a sort of passionate dislike. Fotheringham felt that he had indeed fallen on very evil times, and that the pleasant days of peace were numbered. Cockshaw, when he found that Blunt would neither smoke nor play whist, gave him up as a bore. The very clerks in the office felt agitated and depressed. When Blunt pulled out his spectacles, and produced his papers,

and went ruthlessly into figures, looking rigid and tough, and implacable and indefatigable, both Fotheringham and Cockshaw knew that their places were not worth having, and that they must look for comfortable quarters elsewhere. Fotheringham counted the months to the time when his pension would be due. Cockshaw, who was a man of action, applied forthwith for the Chief Commissionership of the Carraway Islands, which was just then in the market.

Blunt had not been many weeks at Dustypore before he showed to demonstration at the Board that the accounts were kept on an entirely wrong footing, and that a vast sum of money, five or six lakhs, was not traceable.

‘It is the floating balance,’ said Fotheringham, with an air of quiet assurance arising

from his having given the same reply frequently before, and always found it answer.

‘Perhaps you will trace it, then,’ said Blunt, pushing the papers across to Fotheringham in the most unfeeling way. ‘I cannot.’

‘We had better send for Strutt,’ said Cockshaw, who knew nothing about the accounts himself, and had a nervous distrust of Fotheringham’s explanations. Thereupon Strutt appeared, radiant and self-satisfied, and cleared up everything with the easy air of a man who is and who feels himself thoroughly master of the situation.

‘No,’ he said, in reply to Fotheringham’s enquiry, ‘not in the floating balance, but in Suspense Account A : here it is, you see : one item, 2 lakhs—85,000 rs. 15 annas 3 pie.’

‘Of course,’ said Fotheringham, ignoring

his blunder with an air of placid dignity ;  
'there, you see, it is !'

'Well,' said Blunt, insatiable of explanation, 'but you said it was in the floating balance ; and pray where are the other items, and what is Suspense Account A, and how many other Suspense Accounts have you ? Pray go on, Mr. Strutt.'

So Mr. Strutt had to go on, and then it was sad to see the brightness fade out of his face, and his pleasant swagger disappear, and his answers get wilder and wilder as Blunt led him from figure to figure, puzzled him by putting things in all sorts of new lights, and finally took him completely out of his depth.

This was not the sort of treatment to which Strutt had been accustomed, or for which he was constitutionally fitted. At last, in despair, he sent down for Vernon and

the Head Accountant, and these two brought up a pile of ledgers, and traced the missing sums from one account into another in a manner which baffled all Fotheringham's attempts to follow them, and proved at last to their own satisfaction that all was right.

Still the horrible Blunt was only half convinced.

'All *may* be right,' he said, 'and I will take your words that it *is* so. But the figures do not prove it; nor do they prove anything except that the system of accounts is deplorable. Any amount of fraud might be perpetrated under them. I can't understand them: Strutt does not understand them: not one of you gentlemen understands them. This may suit you; but, as for me, I hate what I cannot understand.'

So no doubt did Fotheringham, and this



was one reason why he so cordially hated Blunt.

Another thing about Blunt that irritated his colleagues was his way of coughing—a loud, harsh, strident cough—whenever he was vexed.

‘His coughs are quite like oaths,’ Fotheringham said, with a shudder; and it must be confessed that Blunt could throw an expression that sounded horribly like ‘damn it’ into his mode of clearing his throat; and that when Fotheringham was arguing with him he cleared his throat oftener and more vigorously than can have been necessary.

## CHAPTER IV.

## FELICIA.

The laws of marriage character'd in gold  
Upon the blanched tablets of her heart,  
A love still burning upward, giving light  
To read those laws : an accent very low  
In blandishment, but a most silver flow  
    Of subtle-paced counsel in distress,  
Right to the heart and brain, tho' undescried,  
    Winning its way with extreme gentleness  
Through all the outworks of suspicious pride.

THE new home in which Maud found herself might well have contented a more fastidious critic than she was at all inclined to be. The Vernons were delightful hosts. Maud had established thoroughly comfortable relations with her cousin during the long journey to Dustypore; and though he was too in-

dolent or, perhaps, too much absorbed in work for anything but a sort of passive politeness, still this was, upon the whole, satisfactory and reassuring, and Maud felt very much at her ease with him. Mrs. Vernon, the 'Cousin Felicia,' whom Maud now realised in flesh and blood for the first time, inspired her with a stronger, keener feeling of admiration than any she had known before. She was beautiful, as Maud had often heard; but beauty alone would not account for the thrill of pleasure which something in Felicia's first greeting gave her. The charm lay in an unstudied, unconscious cordiality of manner that fascinated the new-comer with its sincerity and grace. Felicia coruscated with cheerfulness, courage, mirth. She was bright, and infected those about her with brightness. Transplanted

from the quiet luxury of an English country-house to the rough experiences of Indian life, she bore through them all an air of calmness, joyousness, refinement, which the troubles of life seemed incapable of disturbing. When, years before, just fresh from the schoolroom, and with all the dazzling possibilities of a London Season before her, she had admitted her attachment to Vernon, and her unalterable desire to go with him to India, her father's face had looked darker than she had ever seen it before; and a family chorus of indignation had proclaimed the unwisdom of the choice. The rector's son and the squire's daughter, however, had played about together as boy and girl, and long years of intimacy had cemented a friendship too strong to be shattered by such feeble blows as worldliness or prudence could inflict

upon it. Vernon had nothing but the slender portion which a country clergyman might be expected to leave his children at his death ; nothing, that is, except a long list of school and college honours, and a successful candidature for the Indian Civil Service. Felicia, as her deploring aunts murmured amongst themselves, 'was a girl who might have married *anyone* ;' and her parents, without incurring the charge of a vulgar ambition, might naturally complain of a match which gave them so little, and cost them the pang of so complete a separation. Felicia, at any rate, had never repented of her choice ; she was greatly in love with her husband, and had the pleasant consciousness that his taste—fastidious, critical, and not a little sarcastic—found in her nothing that was not absolute perfection. India had developed in her a

self-reliance and fortitude which never could have been born in the safe tranquillity of her home. The hot winds of Dustypore had not quite robbed her cheeks of their English bloom; but there were lines of suffering, anxiety, and fatigue which, when her face was at rest, let out the secret that her habitual brightness was not as effortless as it seemed.

The fact was that life, with all its enjoyments, had been to her full of pangs, of which, even at a safe distance, she could scarcely trust herself to think. The separation from her home was a grief that long usage made none the easier to bear. On the contrary, there was a sort of aching want which was never appeased, and which the merest trifle—a letter—a message—a word—was sufficient to light up into something like

anguish. Felicia never achieved the art of reading her home letters with decent composure, and used to carry them, with a sort of nervous uneasiness, to her own room, to be dealt with in solitude. Then four children, all with an air of Indian fragility, and whose over-refined looks their mother would thankfully have bartered for a little vigour and robustness, had cost her many a heartache. On the horizon of all her married life there loomed the dreadful certainty of a day when another series of separations would begin, and the choice would lie between the companionship of her husband in India or the care of her children at home.

From this horrid thought it was natural for such a temperament as Felicia's to seek refuge in merriment, which, if some-

times a little strained, was never wholly unnatural. Excitement was a pleasant cure for gloomy thought, and it was to Felicia never hard to find. Every sort of society amused her, and those who saw her only in public would have pronounced her a being to whom melancholy was inconceivable. Her husband, however, could have told that Felicia was often sad. There were afternoons, too, when she was quite alone, when she would order the carriage, and drive away by an unfrequented road to the dreary, lonely Station Cemetery, and weep passionate tears over a grave where years before she and her husband had come one morning together and left a precious little wasted form, and Felicia had felt that happiness was over for her, and that life could never be the same again. Nor was it, for there



are some griefs which travel with us to our journey's end.

Charmed as Maud had been with her newly-found relation, she was conscious of the stiffness of a perfectly unaccustomed life, and thought wistfully of the pleasures of the voyage, and even of her French and geography with Miss Goodenough. Felicia, with all her kindness, just a little alarmed her, she was so brilliant, so dignified, and, quite unconsciously, so much of a fine lady. Vernon was buried in his books, or away at office, and very seldom available for the purposes of conversation. The days, despite the excitement of novelty, dragged heavily, and Maud began to think that if every day was to be as long as these, and there were three hundred and sixty-five of them in the year, and fifty years, perhaps, in

a lifetime, how terrific an affair existence was!

Before, however, she had been a week at Dustypore the ice began to melt. Felicia came in one morning from a long busy time with nurses, children, servants, and house-keeping, established herself in an easy-chair, close to Maud, and was evidently bent upon a chat. Maud found herself presently, she knew not how, pouring out all her most sacred secrets and giving her heart away in a most reckless fashion to a companion whom, so far as time went, she still regarded as almost a stranger. Such a confession she had never made, even to Miss Goodenough, nor felt inclined to make it. Now, however, it seemed to come easily and as a matter of course. Felicia was sympathetic, and greatly interested.

Even the episode of the valentine was not forgotten.

‘There,’ Maud cried, with a slightly nervous dread of telling something either improper or ridiculous; ‘that was my very last schoolgirl scrape. Was it very bad?’

‘Very bad!’ cried Felicia, with a laugh, the joyousness of which was entirely reassuring; ‘it was that naughty boy who got you into trouble. Fortunately there are no galleries in our church here, and no boys, so there is nothing to fear.’

That evening Felicia was singing an old familiar favourite air, as she was fond of doing, half in the dark, and unconscious of a listener. Vernon was deep in his papers in the adjoining room. Maud, at the other end of the piano, where she had been turning

over the leaves of some music, stood, with her hand still resting on the page, gazing at the singer and wrapt in attention. Something, she knew not what, nor stopped to ask—the time, the place, the song, or the tone of Felicia's voice—touched her as with a sudden gust of feeling. When the song was over Maud walked across, flung her arms round her companion, and kissed her with a sort of rapture.

Felicia, looking up, surprised, saw that the other's eyes were full of tears.

'That is pretty, is it not?' she said, taking Maud's hand kindly in her own.

'Sing it once more,' Maud petitioned. And so, while Vernon, unconscious of the flow of sentiment so close about him, was still absorbed in the vicissitudes of Orissa, Felicia's performance was encored, and two

sympathetic natures had found each other out and worked into unison.

Afterwards, when Maud had departed, Felicia, with characteristic impulsiveness, broke out into vehement panegyric—

‘Come, George,’ she said, ‘don’t be stupid, please, and uninterested; don’t you think she is quite charming?’

‘Felicia,’ said her husband, ‘you are for ever falling in love with some one or other, and now you have lost your heart to Maud. No, I don’t think her charming; but I dare say a great many other people will. She will be the plague of our lives, you will see. I wish we had left her at Miss Good-enough’s.’

‘Of course everybody will fall in love with her,’ cried Felicia, quite undaunted by her husband’s gloomy forebodings; ‘and I

will tell you what, George—she will do delightfully for Jem.’

‘Jem!’ exclaimed her husband, with a tone of horror. ‘Felicia, you are match-making already—and Jem too, poor fellow!’

Now, Jem Sutton was Vernon’s oldest friend, and Felicia’s kinsman, faithful servant, and ally. Years before, the two men had boated and cricketed together at Eton, and spent pleasant weeks at each other’s homes; and when they met in India, each seemed to waken up the other to a host of affectionate recollections about their golden youth. Sutton, in fact, was still a thorough school-boy, and as delighted with finding his old chum as if he had just come back from the holidays. He had contrived to get as much marching, fighting, and adventuring into his ten years’ service as a man could wish—had

led several border forays with daring and success; had received several desperate wounds, of which a great scar across the forehead was the most conspicuous; had established a reputation as a rider and a swordsman; and had received from his Sovereign the brilliant distinction of the Victoria Cross, which, along with a great many other honourable badges, covered the wide expanse of his chest on state occasions.

Despite his fighting proclivities, Sutton had the softest possible pair of blue eyes, his hair was still as bright a brown as when he was a curly-pated lad at his mother's side; nor did the copious growth of his moustache quite conceal a smile that was sweetness and honesty itself. Felicia's two little girls regarded him as their especial property, and made the tenderest avowals of devotion to

him. Sutton treated them, as all their sex, with a kindness that was chivalrously polite, and which they were already women enough to appreciate.

Lastly, among other accomplishments, which rendered him especially welcome at the Vernons' house, he possessed a tuneful tenor voice, and sang Moore's Melodies with a pathos which was more than artistic. On the whole, it is easy to understand how natural it seemed to Felicia that two such charming people as Sutton and Maud should be destined by Heaven for each other, and that hers should be the hand to lead them to their happy fate.



## CHAPTER V.

## 'SUTTON'S FLYERS.'

Consider this—he had been bred i' the wars  
Since he could draw a sword.

'SUTTON'S FLYERS' were well known in the Sandy Tracts as the best irregular cavalry in that part of the country. Formed originally in the Mutiny, when spirits of an especial hardihood and enterprise gathered instinctively around congenial leaders, they had retained ever since the *prestige* then acquired, and a standard of chivalry which turned every man in the regiment into something of a hero. Many a stalwart lad, bred in the wild uplands of the Province,

had felt his blood stirred within him at the fame of exploits which appealed directly to instincts on which the pacific British rule had for years put an unwelcome pressure. Around the fire of many an evening meal, in many a gossiping bazaar, in many a group at village well or ferry, the fame of the 'Flyers' was recounted, and 'Sutton Sahib' became a household word by which military enthusiasm could be speedily turned into a blaze. With the lightest possible equipage—wiry country-bred horses—and a profound disregard for all baggage arrangements, Sutton had effected some marches which earned him the credit of being supernaturally ubiquitous. Again and again had Mutineer detachments, revelling in fancied security, found that the dreaded horsemen, whom they fancied a hundred miles away, and marching

in an opposite direction, had heard of their whereabouts, and were close upon their tracks. Then the suddenness of the attack, the known prowess of the leader, the half-superstitious reverence which his followers paid him, invested the troop with a tradition of invincibility, and had secured them, on more than one occasion, a brilliant success against odds which less fervent temperaments than Sutton's might have felt it wrong to encounter, and which certainly made success seem almost a miracle. To his own men Sutton was hardly less than a god, and there were few of them on whom he could not safely depend to gallop with him to their doom.

More than one of his officers had saved his life in hand-to-hand fight by reckless exposure of their own ; and his adjutant had

dragged him, stunned, crushed, and bleeding, from under a fallen horse, and carried him through a storm of bullets to a place of safety. All of them, on the other hand, had experienced on a hundred occasions the benefit of his imperturbable calmness, his inspiring confidence, and unshaken will. Once Sutton had gratified their pride—and perhaps, too, his own—by a display of prowess which, if somewhat theatrical, was nevertheless extremely effective. A fight was on hand, and the regiment were just going into action, when a Mahomedan trooper, famed as a swordsman on all the country-side, had ridden out from the enemy's lines, bawled out a defiance of the English rule, couched in the filthiest and most opprobrious terms, and dared Sutton to come out and fight, and let him throw his carcase

to the dogs. There are moments when instinct becomes our safest, and indeed our only, guide. Sutton, for once in his life, felt a gust of downright fury : he gave the order to halt and sheathe swords, took his challenger at his word, rode out in front of his force, and had a fair hand-to-hand duel with the hostile champion. The confronted troops looked on in breathless anxiety, while the fate of either combatant depended on a turn of the sword, and each fought as knowing that one or other was to die. Sutton at last saw his opportunity for a stroke which won him the honours of the day. It cost him a sabre-cut across his forehead, which to some eyes might have marred his beauty for ever ; but the foul-mouthed Mussulman lay dead on the field, smitten through the heart, and Sutton rode

back among his shouting followers the acknowledged first swordsman of the day.

Such a man stood in no need of Felicia's panegyrics to seem very impressive in the eyes of a girl like Maud. Despite his gentleness of manner, and the sort of domestic footing on which everybody at the Vernons', down to the baby, evidently placed him, she felt a little awed. She was inclined to be romantic; but it was rather alarming to have a large, living, incarnate romance sitting next her at luncheon, cutting slices of mutton, and asking her, with a curiosity that seemed necessarily condescending, about all the details of the voyage. There seemed something incongruous and painfully below the mark in having to tell him that they had acted 'Woodcock's Little Game,' and had played 'Bon Jour, Philippe,' on board; and

Maud, when the revelation became necessary, made it with a blush. After luncheon, however, Sutton and the little girls had a game of 'Post,' and Maud began to console herself with the reassuring conviction that, after all, he was but a man, and a very pleasant one.

After he had gone, Felicia, who was the most indiscreet of match-makers, began one of her extravagant eulogiums. 'Like him!' she cried, in reply to Maud's enquiry; 'like is not the word. He is the best, noblest, bravest, and most chivalrous of beings.'

'Not the handsomest!' interrupted Maud, tempted by Felicia's enthusiasm into feeling perversely indifferent.

'Yes, and the handsomest too,' Felicia said; 'tall, strong, with beautiful features, and

eyes as soft and tender as a woman's ; indeed a great deal softer than most women's.'

• 'Then,' objected Maud, 'why has he never——'

'Because,' answered her companion, indignantly anticipating the objection, 'there is no one half-a-quarter good enough for him.'

'Well,' said the other, by this time quite in a rebellious mood, 'all I can say is that *I* don't think him in the least good-looking. I don't like that great scar across his forehead.'

'Don't you ?' cried Felicia ; and then she told her how the scar had come there, and Maud could no longer pretend not to be interested.

The next day Sutton came with them for a drive, and Maud, who had by this time shaken off her fears, began to find him decidedly interesting. There was some-



thing extremely romantic in having a soldier, whose reputation was already almost historical, the hero of a dozen brilliant episodes, coming tame about the house, only too happy to do her bidding or Felicia's, and apparently perfectly contented with their society. Felicia was in the highest spirits, for she found her pet project shaping itself with pleasant facility into a fair prospect of realisation ; and when Felicia was in high spirits they infected all about her.

Sutton, innocently unconscious of the cause of her satisfaction, but realising only that she wanted Maud amused and befriended, lent himself with a ready zeal to further her wishes, and let no leisure afternoon go by without suggesting some new scheme of pleasure. Maud's quick, impulsive, highly-strung temperament, her moods

of joyousness or depression, hardly less transient than the shadows that flit across the fields in April, her keen appreciation of beauty and pathos, made her, child as she was in most of her thoughts and ways, an interesting companion to him. Her eagerness in enjoyment was a luxury to see ; and Sutton, a good observer, knew before long, almost better than herself, what things she most enjoyed. Instead of the reluctant and unsympathetic permission which her late instructress had accorded to her poetical tastes, Sutton and Felicia completely understood what she felt, treated her taste on each occasion with a flattering consideration, and led her continually to ' fresh woods and pastures new,' where vistas of loveliness, fairer far than any she had yet discovered, seemed to break upon her.

Vernon's library, his one extravagance, was all that the most fastidious scholar could desire ; any choice edition of a favourite poet was on his table almost before his English friends had got it. A beautiful book, like a beautiful woman, deserves the best attire that art can give it, and Maud felt a thrill of satisfaction at all the finery of gilt and Russian leather in which she could now behold her well-beloved poems arrayed. Sutton told her, with a decisiveness which carried conviction, what things she would like, and what she might neglect ; and she soon followed his directions with unquestioning faith. He used to come and read to them sometimes, in a sweet, impressive manner, Maud felt ; and the passage, as he had read it, lived on in her thoughts with the precise shade of feeling which his voice had given it.

One happy week was consecrated to the 'Idylls of the King,' and this had been so especially delightful as to make a little epoch in her existence—so rich was the picture—so great a revelation of beauty—such depths of sorrow—such agonies of repentance—such calm, quiet, ethereal scenes of loveliness.

More than once Sutton, in reading, had looked up suddenly, and found her eyes bent full upon him, and swimming with tears; and Maud had stooped over her work, the sudden scarlet dyeing her cheek, yet almost too much moved to care about detection.

How true, how real, how living it all seemed! Did it, in truth, belong to the far-off, misty, fabulous kingdom over which the mystic Arthur ruled, or was she herself Elaine, and Lancelot sitting close before her,

and all the harrowing story playing itself out in her own little troubled world? Anyhow, it struck a chord which vibrated pleasantly, yet with a half-painful vehemence, through her mind, and filled it with harmonies and discords unheard before. Certainly, it must be confessed, there was a something about Sutton that touched one to the heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

'A COMPETITION WALLAH.'

Ainsi doit être  
Un petit-maître:  
Léger, amusant,  
Vif, complaisant,  
          Plaisant,  
Raillieur aimable,  
Traître adorable ;  
C'est l'homme du jour,  
Fait pour l'amour.

ONE of the stupid things that people do in India is to select the two hottest hours of the day for calling on each other. How such an idiotic idea first found its way into existence, by what strange fate it became part of the social law of Anglo-Indians, and how it is that no one has yet been found

with courage or strength enough to break down a custom so detrimental to the health and comfort of mankind, are among the numerous mysteries which the historian of India must be content to leave unsolved. Like Chinese ladies' feet, the high heels on which fashionable Europe at present does penance, suttee of Hindu widows, and infanticide among the Raj-poot nobles, it is merely a curious instance that there is nothing so foolish and so disagreeable that human beings will not do or endure it if it only becomes the fashion.

At any rate, the ladies and gentlemen of Dustypore were resolved not to be a whit less fashionable and uncomfortable than their neighbours, and religiously exchanged visits from twelve to two.

Maud's arrival was the signal for a burst

of callers, and a goodly stream of soldiers and civilians arrived day by day to pay their homage to the newly-arrived beauty and her chaperon. Felicia's house was always popular, and all that was pleasantest and best in Dustypore assembled at her parties. Young London dandies fresh from home, and exploring the Sandy Tracts under the impression of having left the *Ultima Thule* of civilisation far behind them, were sometimes startled to find her drawing-room as full of taste, luxury, and refinement as if they had suddenly been transported to Eaton Square.

What is the nameless grace that some women have the art of putting into chairs and tables, which turns them from mere bits of upholstery into something hardly short of poetry? How is it that in some rooms there



breathes a subtle charm, an aroma of delicacy and culture, a propriety in the behaviour of the sofas and ottomans to one another, a pleasant negligence apparent through the general order, a courageous simplicity amid elaborated comfort, which, in the absence of the mistress, tells the expectant visitor that he is about to meet a thoroughbred lady?

Some such fascination, at any rate, there lingered about the cool, carefully-shaded room in which Felicia received her guests. It was by no means smart, and not especially tidy, for it was often invaded and occupied by a victorious horde from the nursery, and bore many a sign of the common-place routine of daily life. But to Felicia's friends it was an enchanted abode, where a certain refuge might be found from whatever disagreeable things or people prevailed outside,

and where Felicia, who, whatever she might feel, always looked calm and radiant and cool, presided as the *genius loci*, to forbid the possibility of profane intrusion.

One thing that made it picturesque was that at all times and seasons it abounded in flowers. Felicia was an enthusiastic gardener, and her loving skill and care could save many a tender plant which would, in a less experienced hand, have withered and sunk under the burning heat and dust that prevailed everywhere but in the confines of Felicia's kingdom. Her garden gave her a more home-like feeling than any other Indian experience. It refreshed her to go out early in the morning, while the children were yet asleep, and the sun's rays had barely surmounted the tall rows of plantains that marked the garden's boundary, and guarded

her treasures from the sultry air. It soothed her to superintend ferns and roses, cuttings from some Himalayan shrub, or precious little seedlings from England. By dint of infinite care she had created a patch of turf, which, if not quite as green, fresh, and dewy as the lawn at home, was, at any rate, a rest to eyes weary with dazzling wastes and the bright blazing air. There Felicia had a shady corner, where pots and sticks and garden-tools attested the progress of many a new gardening experiment, and where the water forced up from the well at the garden's end went rippling by with a pleasant sound, cooling and softening all the air around. There oftentimes her fancies would wander to the pleasant Manor House, where her taste for flowers had been acquired in her father's company, and she would be again

fern-hunting with him through some cool mossy woodland, or wandering through a paradise of bluebells, with the well-loved beeches towering overhead, while the sweet summer evening died slowly away.

Early amongst the visitors Mr. Desvœux was announced, and Felicia, when she saw his card, told Maud that she would be sure now to be very much amused.

‘He is the most brilliant of all the young civilians,’ she said, ‘and is to do great things. But he talks great nonsense, and abuses everybody. So don’t be astonished at anything you hear.’

‘And is he nice?’ enquired Maud.

Felicia made a little face, not altogether of approval.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘he is more curious than nice;’ and then Desvœux made his appear-

ance, and, while he was exchanging preliminary common-places with Felicia, Maud had an opportunity of observing the visitor's exterior claims, which were not inconsiderable, to the regard of womankind.

He was certainly, Maud felt at once, extremely handsome, and, apparently, extremely anxious to be thought so. The general effect which he produced was that of a poetical dandy. He was dressed with a sort of effeminate finery, with here and there a careless touch which redeemed it all from utter fopdom. He was far too profusely set about with pretty things, locketts and rings, and costly knick-knacks ; on the other hand, his handkerchief was tied with a more than Byronic negligence. The flower in his buttonhole was exquisite, but it was stuck in with a carelessness which, if studied, was

none the less artistic. On the whole he was overdressed; but he walked into the room with the air of a man who had forgotten all about it, and who had no eyes or thoughts for anything but his present company.

Maud soon began to think him very entertaining, but, as Felicia had said, 'curious.' He was full of fun, extravagant, joyous, unconventional; he had turned, after the first few sentences, straight upon Maud, and pointedly invited her into the conversation; and she soon felt her spirits rising.

'I saw you this morning,' he said, 'in the distance, riding with Sutton. I should have asked to be allowed to join you, but that I was too shy, and Sutton would have hated me for spoiling his *tête-à-tête*.'

'Three is an odious number, is it not, Mr. Desvœux?' said Felicia, 'and should be

expunged from the arithmetic books. Why was it ever invented?'

'In order, I suppose,' said Desvœux, 'that we three might meet this morning, and that there might be three Graces, and three witches in Macbeth, and three members of the Salt Board. Three is evidently a necessity; but when I am of the trio, and two of us are men, I confess I don't like it. It is so nice to have one's lady all to oneself. But, Miss Vernon, you are alarmed, I know, and naturally; you think that I am going to ask, what I suppose fifty people have been asking you all the week, whether you enjoyed the voyage to India, and how you like the looks of Dustypore. But I will be considerate, and spare you. Enjoyed the voyage, indeed! What a horrid mockery the question seems!'

‘ But I *did* enjoy it,’ cried Maud ; ‘ so you see that you might have asked me after all. It was very exciting.’

‘ Yes, all the excitement of wondering every day what new mysteries of horror the ship’s cooks will devise for delectation ; and whether the sinews of Sunday’s turkey can rival those of Saturday’s goose ; the excitement of going to bed in the dark, and treading on a black-beetle ; the excitement of shaving in a gale of wind, and cutting one’s nose off, as I very nearly did ; the excitement of the young ladies who are expecting their lovers at Bombay, and of the young ladies who will not wait till Bombay, but manufacture their lovers out of hand. It is too thrilling !’

‘ Well,’ said Maud, ‘ we had theatricals, and readings, and dances, and a gentleman



who played the most lovely variations on the violin, and I enjoyed it all immensely !'

'Ah,' said Desvœux, as if suddenly convinced, 'then perhaps you are even capable of liking Dustypore !'

'Poor Mr. Desvœux !' said Felicia ; 'how sorry you must be to have finished your march, and be back again at stupid Dustypore !'

'No place is stupid where Mrs. Vernon is,' said Desvœux, gallantly ; 'or rather no place would be, if she were not so often "not at home."'

'That must be,' Felicia said, 'because you call on mail-days, when I am busy with my home despatches.'

The real truth was that Felicia considered Desvœux in need of frequent setting down, and closed the door inhospitably

against him, whenever he showed the least inclination to be intimate.

‘Well,’ said Desvœux, ‘the days that you are busy with your despatches, and when I have written the Agent’s, I do not find it lively, I admit. Come, Mrs. Vernon, the Fotheringhams, for instance — does not the very thought of them leave a sort of damp upon your mind? It makes one shudder.’ Then Desvœux passed on to the other officials, upon whom he poured the most vehement contempt.

The Salt Board, he told Maud, always from time immemorial consisted of the three greatest fogies in the service; that was the traditional rule; it was only when you were half-idiotic that you could do the work properly. As for Mr. Fotheringham, he was

a lucky fellow ; his idiocy had developed early and strong.

'That is why Mrs. Vernon detests him so.'

'I don't detest him at all,' said Felicia ; 'but I think him rather dull.'

'Yes,' said Desvœux, with fervour ; 'as Dr. Johnson said of some one, he was, no doubt, dull naturally, but he must have taken a great deal of pains to become as dull as he is now. Now, Miss Vernon, would you like to see what the Board is like ? First, you must know that I am the Agent's private secretary, and part of my business is to knock his and their heads together and try to get a spark out. That is how I come to know about them. First I will show you how Vernon puts on his air of under-secretary, and looks at me with a sort of serious,

bored, official air, as if he were a bishop, and thought I was going to say something impertinent.'

'As I dare say you generally are,' said Felicia, quite prepared to do battle for her husband.

'Well,' said Desvœux, 'this is how he sits and looks—gravity and fatigue personified.'

'Yes,' cried Maud, clapping her hands with pleasure; 'I can exactly fancy him.'

'Then,' continued Desvœux, who was really a good mimic, and warming rapidly into the work, 'in comes the Board. First Fotheringham, condescending and serene, and wishing us all good morning, as if he were the Pope dispensing a blessing. You know his way—like this? Then here is Cockshaw, looking sagacious, but really

pondering over his last night's rubber, and wishing the Board were over.'

Felicia was forced to burst out laughing at the imitation.

'And now,' cried Maud, 'give us Mr. Blunt.'

Desvœux put on Blunt's square, awkward manner, and coughed an imprecatory cough.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'your figures are wrong, your arguments false, and your conclusions childish. I don't want to be offensive or personal, and I have the highest possible opinion of your genius; but you must allow me to observe that you are all a pack of fools!'

'Capital,' cried Maud. 'And what do you do all the time, Mr. Desvœux?'

'Oh, Vernon and I sit still and wink at each other, and hope for the time when we

shall have become idiotic enough to be on the Board ourselves. We are of the new *régime*, and are supposed to have wits, and we have a great deal of intelligence to get over. But you know how the old ones were chosen. All the stupidest sons of the stupidest families in England for several generations, like the pedigree-wheat, you know, on the principle of selection; none but the blockheads of course would have anything to do with India.'

'Don't abuse the bridge that carries you over,' Felicia said. 'No treason to India—it has many advantages.'

'Innumerable,' cried Desvœux: 'first, a decent excuse for separation between husbands and wives who happen to be uncongenial—no other society has anything to compare with it. You quarrel, you know——'

'No, we don't,' said Felicia, 'thank you. Speak for yourself.'

'Well, I quarrel with Mrs. Desvœux, we'll say—though, by the way, I could not quarrel even with my wife—but suppose a quarrel, and we become mutually insupportable: there is no trouble, no scandal, no inconvenience. Mrs. Desvœux' health has long required change of air; I secure a berth for her on the P. & O., escort her with the utmost politeness to Bombay, have a most affectionate parting, remit once a quarter, write once a fortnight—what can be more perfect?'

'But suppose,' said Maud, 'for the sake of argument, that you don't quarrel, and don't want to separate?'

'Oh, suppose,' said Felicia, who knew that the conversation was taking just the

turn she hated, 'that we try our duet, Mr. Desvœux? You know that you are a difficult person to catch.'

'That is one of your unjust speeches,' said Desvœux, dropping his voice as they approached the piano, and becoming suddenly serious. 'You know that I come quite as often as I think I have a chance of being welcome.'

Felicia ignored the remark, and began playing the accompaniment with the utmost unconcern. The fact was that Desvœux, though not quite such a Don Juan as he liked to be thought, had a large amount of affection to dispose of, and had given Felicia to understand upon twenty occasions that he would like to begin a flirtation with her if he dared.



## CHAPTER VII.

## THE RUMBLE CHUNDER GRANT.

Monstrum horrendum—informe—ingens ——

THERE were many things which a man was expected to know about in official circles at Dustypore, and first and foremost was the 'Rumble Chunder Grant.' Not to know this argued oneself not only unknown but ignorant of the first principles of society and the common basis on which thought and conversation proceeded. It was like not having read Mr. Trollope's novels, or knowing nothing about the Tichborne Trial, or being in any other way out of tune with the times.

One of the things that gave the old civilians such a sense of immeasurable superiority over all outsiders and new-comers was the consciousness that with them rested this priceless secret, this mystery of mysteries.

One inconvenient consequence, however, of everybody being expected to know was, that everybody took for granted that everybody else did know, and that those who did not know veiled their ignorance under a decent mask of familiarity, and by talking about it in a vague, shadowy sort of phraseology which conveniently concealed any little inaccuracies. It had to do with salt, moreover, and it was at the Salt Board that unsearchable depths of the subject were best appreciated, and this vagueness of language most in vogue.

The facts were something of this sort.

When the English took the country we found particular families and villages in Rumble Chunder in enjoyment of various rights in connection with salt; some had little monopolies, others might manufacture for themselves at a quit-rent, others might quarry for themselves at particular times and places, and so forth.

The Gazette which announced the annexation of the province had declared in tones of splendid generosity that the British Government, though inexorable to its foes, would temper justice with mercy so far as to respect existing rights of property, and would protect the loyal proprietor in the enjoyment of his own. The sonorous phrases of a rhetorical Viceroy had entailed on his successors a never-ending series of disputes, and had saddled the empire with an obliga

tion which was all the more burthensome for being undefined. Ever since that unlucky Gazette, officials had been hard at work to find out what it was that the Governor-General had promised to do, and how much it would cost to do it. One diligent civilian after another went down to Rumble Chunder and made out a list of people who were, or who pretended to be, entitled to interests in salt. Then these lists had been submitted and discussed, and minuted upon, and objected to, and returned for further investigation, and one set of officers had given place to another, and the chance of clearing up the matter became fainter every day. Meanwhile the Rumble Chunder people had gone their ways, exercising what rights they could, and happy in the possession of an interminable controversy. In course of time

most of the original documents got destroyed in the Mutiny, or eaten by white ants, and a fresh element of uncertainty was introduced by the question of the authenticity of all existing copies. There had come a new Secretary of State at home, whose views as to the grantees were diametrically opposed to all his predecessors', and who sent peremptory orders to carry out the new policy with the least possible delay. Thus the subject had gradually got itself into a sort of hopeless trough, for which Desvœux used to say that the only effectual remedy would be the end of the world. No one knew exactly what his rights were, and everyone was afraid of endangering his position by too rigid an enquiry or too bold an assertion.

One peculiarity of this, as of most Indian controversies, was the unnatural bitterness of

spirit to which it gave rise. The most amiable officials turned to gall and wormwood at its very mention, and abused each other over it with the vehemence of vexed theologians.

Whether vain attempts to understand it had engendered an artificial spitefulness, or whether discussion, like beer-drinking, is a luxury too strong for natures enfeebled by an Eastern climate, sure enough it was that directly this wretched question came to the fore good-nature, moderation, and politeness were forgotten, and the antagonists made up for the confusion of their ideas by the violence of the language in which they expressed them.

The last phase of the story was, that some of the descendants of the original grantees, thinking the plum was now about

ripe for picking, took up the question in a wily, patient, vexatious sort of way, and produced a tremendous lawsuit. Then a Member of Parliament, whose ideas, by some sudden process (on which his banker's book would probably have thrown some light) had been suddenly turned Indiawards, made the most telling speech in the House, depicting in vivid colours the wrongs of the Rumble Chunder people and the Satanic ruthlessness of British rule. Then pamphlets began to appear, which showed to demonstration that all the Viceroy's had been either liars or thieves, except a few who had been both, and asked how long this Rumble Chunder swindle was to last. The whole subject, in fact, began to be ventilated. Now, ventilation, though a good thing in its time and place, is bad for such veteran institutions

as the Salt Board. Every new ray of daylight let in disclosed an ugly flaw, and the fresh air nearly brought the tottering edifice about the ears of its inhabitants. It needed, as Fotheringham ruefully felt, but the rude, trenchant, uncompromising spirit of a man like Blunt to produce an imbroglio which could neither be endured, concealed, or disposed of in any of the usual methods known to Indian officialdom; and Blunt was known to be hard at work at the statistics, and already to have assumed an attitude of obtrusive hostility. Fotheringham could only fortify himself with the reflection that the Providence which had seen him through a long series of official scrapes would probably not desert him at this last stage of his career. He wished, nevertheless, that he had forestalled Cockshaw in his application for the Carraways.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## GOLDEN DAYS.

O lovely earth ! O lovely sky !  
I was in love with nature, I ;  
And nature was in love with me ;  
O lovely life—when I was free !

FELICIA had been surprised, and not altogether pleased, at the unnecessary cordiality with which Maud had bade their visitor farewell. There was an excitement, an animation, an eagerness in her manner which Felicia had not before perceived, and which she felt, at once, might be difficult to manage. Desvœux was exactly the person whom she did *not* want Maud to like, and the very possibility of her liking him brought

out in Felicia's mind a latent hostility of which, under an exterior of politeness and even familiarity, she was always dimly conscious. She did not mind talking to him herself, she was even amused by him, but then it was always with a kind of protest; she knew exactly how far she meant to go, and felt no temptation to go any further. But the notion of him in any other capacity but that of a remote member of society, whose function it was to say and do absurd things in an amusing way, was strange, and altogether distasteful. Anything like intimacy was not to be thought of for an instant; the merest approach to close contact would bring out some discord, the jar of which, by a sort of instinctive anticipation, Felicia seemed to feel already. So long as he moved in quite another plane, and

belonged to a different world, his eccentricities might be smiled at for their comicality without the application of any rigid canon of taste or morals. But a person who was at once irreligious and over-dressed, who constantly had to be 'put down' for fear he should become offensive, and who was a stranger to all the little Masonic signals by which ladies and gentlemen can find each other out—the very idea of his presuming to cross the pale, and to form any other tie than those of the most indifferent acquaintance, filled Felicia with the strongest repugnance. It was provoking, therefore, that he seemed to take Maud's fancy and impress her more than any other of the many men with whom she was now becoming acquainted. It was more than provoking that she should let her impressions

come so lightly to the surface, and be read in signs which Desvœux's experienced eye would, Felicia knew, have not the least trouble in interpreting.

Suppose—but this was one of the disagreeable suppositions which Felicia's mind put aside at once, as too monstrous to be entertained—suppose he should come to stand in the way of the rightful, proper, destined lover? She thrust aside the notion as absurd. All the same, it made her uncomfortable, and no doubt justified her to herself in pushing forward Sutton's interests with more eagerness than she might otherwise have thought it right to employ about another person's concerns. When one feels a thing to be *the* thing that ought to happen, and sees it in danger of being frustrated by some thoroughly objectionable interference,

it is but natural to do something more than merely wish for a fortunate result. Felicia, at any rate, could boast of no such passivity; and, if praising Sutton would have married him, Felicia's wishes on the subject would have been speedily realised.

The course of love, however, rarely flows exactly in the channels which other people fashion for it, and Maud's inclination required, her cousin felt, the most judicious handling. There could be no harm, however, in allowing Sutton's visits to go on with their accustomed frequency; and since Maud must forthwith learn to ride, and Sutton volunteered to come in the mornings to teach her, no one could blame Felicia if, in the intervals of instruction, the pupil and teacher should become unconsciously proficient in any other art besides that of

equitation. Maud used to come in from these rides with such a bright glow on her cheek, and in such rapturous spirits, that her cousin might well feel reassured.

Sutton had found for her the most perfect pony, whose silky coat, lean, well-chiselled head, and generally aristocratic bearing pronounced it the inheritor of Arab blood. Maud speedily discovered that riding was the most enjoyable of all human occupations. Down by the river's side, or following long woodland paths, where the busy British rule had planted many an acre with the forests of the future, or out across the wide plains of corn stretching for miles, broken only by clumps of palms, or villages nestling each in a little grove, under the wing of some ancestral peepul-tree, the moon still shining overhead, and the sun just above the horizon,

still shrouded in the mists of morning—how fresh, how picturesque, how exhilarating everything looked! How pleasant, too, to go through all these pretty scenes with a companion who seemed somehow to know her tastes and wishes, and to have no thought but how to please her! Sutton, though in public a man of few words and unsatisfactorily taciturn on the subject of his own exploits, had, Maud presently discovered, plenty to tell her when they were alone. The power of observation which made him so nice a judge of character extended itself to all the scene about him, and revealed a hundred touches of interest or beauty which, to coarser or less careful vision, would have lain obscure. Maud felt that she had never known how beautiful nature was till Sutton told her.

‘There,’ he would say, ‘I brought you round this wood that we might not miss that pretty bend of the river, with Humayoun’s Tomb and the palms beyond. See what a beautiful blue background the sky makes to the red dome and that nice old bit of crumbling wall. The bright Indian atmospheres have their own beauty, have they not? And see that little wreath of smoke hanging over the village. This is my pet morning landscape.’

‘And those peach-groves,’ cried Maud, ‘all ablaze with blossom, and those delicious shady mulberries, and the great stretch of green beyond. It is quite enchanting: a sort of dream of peace.’

‘We had a fine gallop across here once, Sutton said, ‘when first we took the Sandy Tracts.’ And then Maud learnt that they



were riding over a battle-field, and that for a long summer's afternoon men had fought and fallen all along the path where now they stood; and that a battery of artillery had been posted at the very corner of the village to which her guide had brought her. 'I remember when they knocked that hole in the old wall yonder, and how all the fellows behind it took to their heels. Then afterwards we stormed the Tomb, and had to finish our fighting by moonlight.'

'Was that when you got your Victoria Cross?' asked Maud, who was possessed by a spirit of insatiable curiosity about Sutton's badges, which he was not slow to gratify.

'Oh, no,' said Sutton, laughing; 'I got nothing then but a bullet through my shoulder, and a knock on the head from a musket-stock which very nearly ended my

soldiering then and there. Look, now, how quickly the scene changes as the sun gets up—half its beauty is gone already! Let us have a good canter over this soft ground, and get home before it grows too hot.'

Maud, who had never thought of a battle except as one of the afflicting details that had to be remembered at an historical class, and if possible to be hooked on to its proper site and date, felt a delicious thrill in actually realising with her own eyes the place where one of the troublesome events took place, and in talking to a person who had actually taken part in it. 'And what became of the bullet in your shoulder?' she asked.

'It was a very troublesome bullet,' said Sutton, 'and a great deal harder to dislodge than the people from the Tomb. But I was unlucky when I was a lad, and never came

out of action without a *souvenir* of some sort or other.'

When Maud got home she asked Felicia about this storming of the Tomb, and learnt that Sutton's account was not as truthful as it might have been. He and half-a-dozen others had, Felicia told her, volunteered for the storming-party, had made a rush for the walls through a shower of bullets; and Sutton and two companions, getting separated from the others, had been left for some seconds to hold their own as best they could against the angry, frightened mob within. No one, perhaps scarcely Sutton himself, knew exactly what had happened. The rest of the party, however, when they made their way in, found him standing at bay over a dead comrade's body, and his antagonists too completely taken

aback at his audacity to venture, at any odds, within reach of his sword. In the scuffle which ensued Sutton received the wounds of which Maud had been informed ; but his exploits were for ever after quoted as a proof that there is nothing which a man may not do, if only he have pluck and will enough to do it.

Maud felt all this very impressive, and Sutton's society more and more delightful. Her enjoyment of it, however—by this time by no means small—began to be seriously qualified by an anxiety, increasingly present to her mind, as to her fitness for the dignified companionship thus thrust upon her. She felt passionately anxious to please Sutton, and more and more distrustful of her power to do so. He was good, noble, chivalrous, everything that Felicia had said, and how

hopelessly above herself ! What must he think of one who was, as Miss Goodenough had often told her, a mere congeries of defects ? True, he never seemed shocked or annoyed at anything she said, and professed to like the rides as much as she did ; but might not this be from mere good-nature, or the charm of novelty, or the wish to oblige Felicia, or any transitory or accidental cause ? Terrifying thought, if some day he should find her wanting, and banish her from his regards ! Meanwhile, happy, happy mornings, and sweet, bright world, in which such pleasure can be found, even if haunted by a doubt as to whether it is really ours or not !

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE FIRST BALL.

Il est aimable, car on se sent toujours en danger avec lui.

BEFORE Maud had been many weeks with the Vernons there was a Garrison Ball, and at this it was fated that she should make her first public appearance in Dustypore society. That night was certainly the most eventful and exciting one that she had ever passed. To wake and find oneself famous is no doubt an agreeable sensation ; but to put on for the first time in one's life a lovely ball-dress, bright, cloudlike, ambrosial—to be suddenly elevated to a pinnacle to receive the homage

of mankind—to exercise a pleasant little capricious tyranny in the selection of partners—to be seized upon by one anxious adorer after another, all striving to please, each with a little flattering tale of his own—to read in a hundred eyes that one is very pretty—to find at last a partner who, from some mysterious reason, is not like other partners, but just perfection—to know that one's views about him are entirely reciprocated—it was, as Maud, on going to bed, acknowledged to herself with a sigh, which was half fatigue and half the utterance of an over-excited temperament, too much enjoyment for a single human soul to carry!

In the first place, Sutton, all ablaze with medals, tall, majestic, impressive—and, as Maud had come to think with Felicia, undeniably handsome—had begged her in the

morning to keep several dances for him. The prospect of this among other things had put her in a flutter. She would have preferred some of the ensigns. It seemed a sort of alarming familiarity. Could such a being valse, and bend, as ordinary mortals do, to the commonplace movements of a mere quadrille? It was one thing to go spinning round with another schoolgirl, under the superintendence of Madame Millville, to the accompaniment of her husband's violin—but to be taken possession of by a being like Sutton, to have to write his name down for two vales and a set of Lancers—to know that in five minutes one will be whirling about under his guidance—the idea was delightful, but not without a touch of awe! Sutton, however, quieted these alarms by dancing in a rather pon-



derous and old-fashioned manner, and finally tearing her dress with his spur. Maud had accordingly to be carried off, in order that the damage might be repaired ; and, her mind somewhat lightened by the sense of responsibility discharged, and the ice satisfactorily broken, looked forward to the rest of the evening with unmingled pleasure. While her torn dress was being set to rights she scanned her card, saw Sutton's name duly registered for his promised dances, and made up her mind, as she compared him with the rest, that there was no one in the room she liked one-half as well.

But then she had not danced with Desvœux ; and Desvœux was now waiting at the door, and imploring her not to curtail the rapture of a valse, the first notes of which had already sounded. Desvœux's dancing,

Maud speedily acknowledged to herself, bore about the same relation to Sutton's that her Arab pony's canter did to the imposing movements of the latter gentleman's first charger. His tongue, too, seemed as nimble as his feet. He was in the highest possible spirits, and the careless, joyous extravagance of his talk struck a sympathetic chord in his companion's nature.'

'There!' he cried, as the last notes of the music died away, and he brought his companion to a standstill at a comfortable sofa. 'Such a valse as that is a joy for ever—a thing to dream of, is it not? Some ladies, you know, Miss Vernon, dance in epic poems, some in the sternest prose—Carlyle, for instance—some in sweet-flowing, undulating, rippling lyrics. Yours is (what shall I say?) an ode of Shelley's, or a song from Tenny-

son, a smile from Paradise ! Where can you have learnt it ?’

‘Monsieur Millville taught us all at my school,’ said Maud, prosaically mindful of the many battles she had had in former days with that gentleman : ‘a horrid little wizened Frenchman, with a fiddle. We all hated him. He was always going on at me about my toes.’

‘Your toes !’ cried Desvœux, with effusion. ‘He wanted to adore them, as I do—sweet points where all the concentrated poetry of your being gathers. Put out that fairy little satin shoe, and let me adore them too !’

‘No, thank you !’ cried Maud, greatly taken aback at so unexpected a request, gathering her feet instinctively beneath her ; ‘it’s not the fashion !’

‘You will not?’ Desvœux said, with a tone of sincere disappointment. ‘Is not that unkind? Suppose it was the fashion to cover up your hands in tulle and satin, and never to show them?’

‘Then,’ Maud said, laughing, ‘you would not be able to adore them either; as it is, you see, you may worship them as much as you please!’

‘I have been worshipping them all the evening. They are lovely—a little pair of sprites.’

‘Stop!’ cried Maud, ‘and let me see. My shoes are fairies, and my dancing a poem, and my fingers sprites! How very poetical! And, pray, is this the sort of way that people always talk at balls?’

‘Not most people,’ said Desvœux, unabashed, ‘because they are geese, and talk

in grooves—about the weather, and the last appointment, and the freshest bit of stale gossip—but it is the way *I* talk, because I only say what I feel, and am perfectly natural.’

‘Natural!’ said Maud, in a tone of some surprise, for her companion’s romantic extravagance seemed to her to be the very climax of unreality.

‘Yes,’ said Desvœux, coolly, ‘and that is one reason why all women like me; partly it is for my good looks, of course, and partly for my dancing, but mostly because I am natural and tell the truth to them.’

‘And partly, I suppose,’ said Maud, who began to think her companion was in great need of setting down, ‘because you are so modest.’

‘As to that, I am just as modest as my

neighbours, only I say it out. One knows when one is good-looking, does one not? and why pretend to be a simpleton? You know, for instance, how very, very pretty you are looking to-night!

‘We were talking about *you*, if you please,’ said Maud, blushing scarlet, and conscious of a truth of which her mirror had informed her.

‘Agreeable topic,’ said the other, gaily; ‘let us return to it by all means! Well, now, I pique myself on being natural. When I am bored I yawn or go away; when I dislike people I show my teeth and snarl; and when I lose my heart I don’t suffer in silence, but inform the fair purloiner of that valuable organ of the theft without hesitation. That is honest at any rate. For instance, I pressed your hand to-night, when

you came in first, to tell you how delighted I was that you were come, to be the belle of the party. You did not mind it, you know !’

‘I thought you very impertinent,’ said Maud, laughing in spite of herself, ‘and so I think you now, and very conceited into the bargain. Will you take me to have some tea, please ?’

‘With all my heart,’ said the other ; ‘but we can go on with our talk. How nice it is that we are such friends, is it not ?’

‘I did not know that we were friends,’ said Maud, ‘and I have not even made up my mind if I like you.’

‘Hypocrite !’ answered her companion ; ‘you know you took a great fancy to me the first morning I came to call on you, and Mrs. Vernon scolded you for it after my departure.’

‘It is not true,’ said Maud, with a stammer and a blush, for Desvœux’s shot was, unfortunately, near the mark ; ‘and anyhow, first impressions are generally wrong.’

‘Wrong !’ cried the other, ‘never, never ! always infallible. Mrs. Vernon abused me directly I was gone. She always does : it is her one fault that prevents her from being absolute perfection. She does not like me, and is always putting me down. It is a great shame, because she has been till now the one lady in India whom I really admire. But let us establish ourselves on this nice ottoman, and I will show you some of our celebrities. Look at that handsome couple talking so mysteriously on the sofa : that is General Beau and Mrs. Vereker, and they are talking about nothing more mysterious than the weather ; but it is the General’s



fancy to look mysterious. Do you see how he is shrugging his shoulders? Well, to that shrug he owes everything in life. Whatever happens, he either shrugs his shoulders, or arches his eyebrows, or says "Ah!" Beyond these utterances he never goes; but he knows exactly when to do each, and does it so judiciously that he has become a great man. He is great at nothing, however, but flirtation; and Mrs. Vereker is just now the reigning deity.'

'No wonder,' cried Maud. 'How lovely she is! such beautiful violet eyes!'

'Yes,' said the other, with a most pathetic air; 'most dangerous eyes they are, I assure you. You don't feel it, not being a man, but they go through and through me. She always has a numerous following, especially of boys, and has broken a host of hearts,

which is all the more unfair, as she does not happen to possess one of her own.'

'She must have a heart, with those eyes and such a smile,' objected Maud.

'Not the least atom, I assure you,' said the other. 'Nature, in lavishing every other grace and charm upon her, made this single omission, much, no doubt, to the lady's own peace of mind. It is all right in the present instance, because Beau does not happen to have any heart either.'

'I don't believe you in the least,' said Maud, 'and I shall get my cousin to take me to call upon her.'

'You are fascinated, you see, already,' said Desvoeux, 'though you are a woman. You will find her a perfect Circe. Her drawing-room is an enchanted cell, hung round with votive offerings from former

victims. She lives on the gifts of worshippers, and will accept everything, from a sealskin jacket to a pair of gloves. I used to be an adorer once, but I could not afford it. Now I will introduce you.' Thereupon he presented Maud in due form. General Beau arched his handsome brow, and said, 'Ah! how d'ye do, Miss Vernon?' in his inscrutable way; and Mrs. Vereker, who, as a reigning beauty, felt an especial interest in one who seemed likely to endanger her ascendancy, was bent on being polite. She gave Maud the sweetest of smiles, scolded Desvœux with the sweetest little pout for not having been to her for an age; and, if she felt jealous, determined, at any rate, not to show it. She observed, however, with the eye of a connoisseur, how Maud's hair was done, and a little mystery of lace and

feathers, just then the fashionable head-dress, which she thought would be immensely becoming to herself. She pressed Maud affectionately to come some day to lunch, inwardly resolved to despoil the pretty *ingénue* of her novelty. Mrs. Vereker was a type of character which Indian life brings into especial prominence, and develops into fuller perfection than is to be found in less artificial communities. Herself the child of Indian parents, whom she had scarcely ever seen, with the slenderest possible stock of home associations, accustomed from the outset to have to look out for herself, she had come to India while still almost a child, and in a few months, long before thought or feeling had approached maturity, had found herself the belle of a station, and presently a bride. These circumstances separated her frequently

from her husband, and she learnt to bear separation heroically. The sweet incense of flattery was for ever rising, and she learnt to love it better every day. Any number of men were for ever ready to throw themselves at her feet and proclaim her adorable ; and she came to feel it right that they should do so. She found that she could conjure with her eyes and mouth, and exercise a little despotism by simply using them as Nature told her. The coldness of her heart enabled her to venture with impunity into dangers where an ardent temperament could scarcely but have gone astray—she was content so long as she lived in a stream of flattery, and half-a-dozen men declared themselves heart-broken about her. Strict people called her a flirt, but friends and foes alike declared her innocence itself.

Beau was devoting himself to her partly because her good looks gave him a slight sense of gratification, partly because he considered it the proper thing to be seen on confidential terms with the handsomest woman in the room, partly to have the pleasure of cutting out the younger men.

Desvœux, delighted with his new-found treasure, was only too happy to leave a quondam rival in possession of the field, and to have a decent excuse for abandoning a shrine at which it was no longer convenient to worship.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE WOES OF A CHAPERON.

The world is out of joint—O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right !

FELICIA came home from the ball in far less high spirits than her *protégée*. Things had not gone as she wished, nor had Maud behaved at all in the manner which Felicia had pictured to herself as natural and appropriate to a young lady making her *début* in polite society. Instead of displaying an interesting timidity, and clinging to her chaperon for guidance and protection, Maud had taken wing boldly at once, as in a congenial atmosphere ; had been far too excited to be in

the least degree shy, and had lent herself with indiscreet facility to a very pronounced flirtation. Felicia began to realise how hard it is to make the people about one be what one wants them to be, and how full of disappointment is the task of managing mankind, even though the fraction operated upon be no larger than a wayward schoolgirl's heart. Maud, whose rapidly increasing devotion to Sutton had for days past been a theme of secret congratulation in Felicia's thoughts, had been behaving all the evening just in the way which Sutton would, she knew, most dislike, and showing the most transparent liking for the person of whom, of all others, he especially disapproved. Sutton, too, Felicia considered, was not comporting himself at all as she would have had him: he lavished every possible kindness on Maud, but then it



was less for Maud's sake than her own ; he would have done, she felt an annoying conviction, exactly the same for either of her little girls ; and though he agreed with her in thinking Maud decidedly picturesque, and in being amused and interested in the fresh, eager, childlike impulsiveness of her character, his thoughts about her, alas ! appeared to go no further.

‘ Why that profound sigh, Felicia ? ’ her husband asked, when Maud had gone away to bed, leaving the two together for the first time during the evening. ‘ Does it mean that some one has been boring you, or what ? ’

‘ It means,’ said Felicia, ‘ that I am very cross, and that Mr. Desvœux is a very odious person.’

‘ And Maud a very silly one, *n'est-ce pas ?* Did not I tell you what a deal of trouble

our good-nature in having her out would be sure to give us? Never let us do a good-natured act again! I tell you Maud is already a finished coquette, and, I believe, would be quite prepared to flirt with me.'

'I wish she would,' said Felicia, in a despairing tone. 'Do you know, George, I do not like these balls at all?'

'Come, come, Felicia, how many vales did you dance to-night?' her husband asked, incredulously, for Felicia was an enthusiastic Terpsichorean.

'That has nothing to do with it,' she said. 'All the people should be nice, and so many people are not nice at all. It is too close quarters. There are some men whose very politeness one resents.'

'Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,' said her husband, 'for instance?'

‘ For instance, General Beau,’ said Felicia. ‘ He looks up in the pauses of his devotions to Mrs. Vereker and turns his eyes upon one as if to say, “ Poor victim! your turn will be the next.” ’

‘ I saw you playing “ Lady Disdain ” to him with great success to-night,’ her husband answered. And indeed it must be confessed that Beau’s advances to Felicia, with whom he was always anxious to stand well, were received by that lady with a slightly contemptuous dignity, very unlike her usual joyous cordiality.

‘ Yes,’ said Felicia; ‘ General Beau’s compliments are more than I can stand. But, George, what can I do with Maud? Is not Mr. Desvœux insufferable?’

‘ Well,’ said her husband, ‘ if a man’s ambition is to be thought a *mauvais sujet*, and

to dress, like a shopboy, *endimanché*, it does not hurt us.'

'But it may hurt Maud,' said Felicia, 'if, indeed, it has not hurt her already. O dear, how I wish she was safely married!'

From the above conversation it may be inferred that the responsibilities of her new charge were beginning to weigh upon Felicia's spirits. Sutton too slow, and Desvœux too prompt, and Maud's fickle fancies inclining now this way, now that, what benevolent custodian of other people's happiness had ever more harassing task upon her hands?

It is probable, however, that had Felicia's insight or experience been greater, the position of affairs would have seemed less fraught with anxiety. Maud's liking for Desvœux was a sentiment of the very

lightest texture ; its very lightness was, perhaps, its charm. With him she was completely at her ease, and experienced the high spirits which being at one's ease engenders. She was certain of pleasing him, but careless whether she did so or not ; his extravagant protestations amused her, and were flattering in a pleasant sort of way, and his high spirits made him an excellent companion, but nothing about him touched her with the keen deep interest that every word or look of Sutton's inspired, or with the same strong anxiety to retain his friendship. Desvœux might come and go, and Maud would have treated either event with the same indifference ; but if Sutton should ever begin to neglect her she was already conscious of a sort of pang which the very idea inflicted. Upon the whole it is probable

that Felicia's apprehensions were groundless. Not the less, however, did she feel disconcerted and aggrieved when, the very next morning after the ball, Desvœux made his appearance, in the highest possible spirits, evidently on the best terms with Maud, and politely ignoring all Felicia's attempts to put him down. He was, as it seemed to her, in his very most objectionable mood, and she felt glad that, at any rate, her husband was at home, and that she was not left to do battle by herself. She resolved to be as unconciliatory as possible. As for Maud it never occurred to her to conceal the pleasure which Desvœux's arrival gave her, and she soon let out the secret that his visit had been pre-arranged.

‘I did not think that you really would come, Mr. Desvœux; it is so nice of you,

because we are both of us far too tired to do anything but be idle, and you can amuse us.'

'You forget, Maud,' said Vernon, 'that Desvœux may be too tired to be amusing.'

'And I,' said Felicia, with a slight shade of contempt in her tones, 'am too tired even to be amused. I feel that Mr. Desvœux's witticisms would only fatigue me. I intend to give up balls.'

'Then,' said Desvœux, with an air of admiring deference which Felicia felt especially irritating, 'balls will have to give up me. I should not think it in the least worth while to be a steward, and to do all the horrid things one has to do—polish the floor, and audit the accounts, and dance official quadrilles with Mrs. Blunt—if our chief patroness chose to patronise no more.'

A ball without Mrs. Vernon would be a May morning without the sunshine.'

'Or a moonlight night without the moon,' said Felicia. 'Allow me to help you to a simile.'

'You see he *is* tired,' said Vernon, 'poor fellow, and for the first time in his life in need of a pretty phrase.'

'Not at all,' said Desvœux, with imper- turbable good-nature. 'I am constantly at a loss, like the rest of the world, for words to tell Mrs. Vernon how much we all admire her. It is only fair that the person who inspires the sentiment should assist us to express it.'

'But,' cried Maud, 'you are forgetting poor me. Who is to take care of me, if you please, in the balls of the future?'

'Yes, Felicia,' said Vernon, 'you cannot



abdicate just yet, I fear. As for me, I feel already far too old.'

'Then,' cried Desvœux, 'you must look at General Beau, and learn that youth is eternal. How nice it is to see him adoring Mrs. Vereker, and to remember that we, too, may be adored some thirty years to come!'

'Beau's manner is very compromising,' said Vernon; 'it is a curious trick. His first object when he likes a lady is to endanger her reputation.'

'Yes,' answered Desvœux, 'he leads her with a serious air to a sofa, or hides himself with her in a balcony; looks gravely into her eyes, and says, "How hot it has been this afternoon!" or something equally interesting; and all the world thinks that he is asking her to elope at least.'

'His manners appear to me to be insuf-

ferable,' Felicia said, in her loftiest style; 'just the sort of familiarity that breeds contempt.'

'Poor fellow!' said Desvœux, who knew perfectly that Felicia's observations were half-intended for himself; 'it is all his enthusiasm. He is as proud of every fresh flirtation as if it were a new experience—like a young hen that has just laid its first egg. He always seems to me to be chuckling and crowing to the universe, "Behold! heaven and earth! I have hatched another scandal." Now,' he added, 'Miss Vernon, if ever you and I had a flirtation we would not wish all the world to "assist," as the French people say, would we? People might suspect our devotion, and guess and gossip; but there would not be this revolting matter-of-fact publicity, and we should be for ever putting

people off the scent. I should still look into the Misses Blunt's eyes, still dance a state quadrille with their mamma, still talk to Mrs. Vereker about the stars, still feel the poetry of Miss Fotheringham's new Paris dresses—you would continue to fascinate mankind at large; only we two between ourselves should know how mutually broken-hearted we had become.'

'That is a contingency,' Felicia said, in a manner which Desvœux understood as a command to abandon the topic, 'which, happily, there is no need to discuss.' The conversation turned to something else; but Felicia made up her mind more than ever, that their visitor was a very impertinent fellow, and more than ever resolved to guard Maud from every form of attack which he could bring to bear against it. No protection

could, she felt, be half so satisfactory as the counter-attraction of a lover who would be everything that Desvœux was not, and whom all the world acknowledged to be alike *sans peur* and *sans reproche*.

## CHAPTER XI.

## FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

After short silence then,  
And summons sent, the great debate began.

A BODY constituted of as discordant elements as the three members of the Salt Board, was not likely to remain very long at peace with itself; and for weeks past, Blunt's increasing truculence of deportment had warned his colleagues of an approaching outbreak.

Since his successful raid upon the Board's accounts, this gentleman had made the lives of Fotheringham and Cockshaw a burden to them. His insatiable curiosity plunged, in the most ruthless manner, into matters which

the others knew instinctively would not bear investigation. He proposed reforms in an off-hand manner which made poor Fotheringham's hair stand on end; and the very perusal of his memoranda was more than Cockshaw's industry could achieve. He had a sturdy cob on which he used to ride about in the mornings, acquiring health and strength to be disagreeable the entire day, and devising schemes of revolution as he went. Poor Cockshaw's application for the Carraways had been refused; General Beau had got the appointment, and was actually in course of a series of valedictory visits to various ladies whom he believed broken-hearted at his departure. Fotheringham grew greyer and sadder day by day, and prepared himself as best he might to meet the blows of fate in an attitude of

dignified martyrdom. Matters at last reached a crisis in a proposal of Blunt's, brought out in his usual uncompromising fashion, and thrust upon the Board, as Fotheringham acknowledged with a shudder, with a horrid point-blank directness which rendered evasion and suppression (the only two modes of dealing with questions which his experience had taught him) alike impossible. In the first place, Blunt demonstrated, by statistics, that not enough salt was produced at the Rumble Chunder quarries to enable the inhabitants to get enough to keep them healthy. Nothing could be more convincing than his figures: so many millions of people—so many thousands of tons of salt—so much salt necessary per annum for each individual, and so forth. Then Blunt went on to show that the classes of diseases prevalent in the Sandy Tracts

were precisely those which want of salt produces; then he demonstrated that there was wholesale smuggling. From all this it followed obviously that the great thing wanted was to buy up existing interests, develop the quarries, improve the roads, and increase the production. If this were done salt might be sold at a rate which would bring it within the reach of all classes, and yet the gains of Government would be increased. This was Blunt's view. The opposite party urged that to vary the salt-supply would interfere with the laws of political economy, would derange the natural interaction of supply and demand (this was one of Fotheringham's favourite weapons), would depress internal trade, paralyse existing industries, cause all sorts of unlooked-for results, and not benefit the consumer a



whit; and that, even if it would, ready money was not to be had at any price. Blunt, however, was not to be put off with generalities, and claimed to record his opinions, that his colleagues should record theirs, and that the whole matter should be submitted to the Resident. Cockshaw gave a suppressed groan, lit a cheroot, and mentally resolved that nothing should tempt *him* into writing a memorandam, or, if possible, into allowing anybody else to do so. 'For God's sake,' he said, 'don't let us begin minuting upon it; if the matter must go to Empson, let us ask him to attend the Board, and have it out once for all.' Now, Mr. Empson was at this time Resident at Dustypore. The custom was that he came to the Board only on very solemn occasions, and only when the division of opinion was

hopeless ; then he sat as Chairman, and his casting vote decided the fortunes of the day.

The next Board day, accordingly, Empson appeared, and it soon became evident that Blunt was to have his vote.

Fotheringham was calm, passive, and behaved throughout with the air of a man who thought it due to his colleagues to go patiently through with the discussion, but whose mind was thoroughly made up. The fight soon waxed vehement.

‘ Look,’ said Blunt, ‘ at the case of cotton in the Kutchpurwanee District.’

‘ Really,’ said Fotheringham, ‘ I fail to see the analogy between cotton and salt.’ This was one of Fotheringham’s stupid remarks, which exasperated both Empson and Blunt, and made them flash looks of intelligence across the table at each other.

‘Then,’ Blunt said, with emphasis, ‘I’ll explain the analogy. Cotton was twopence-halfpenny per pound, and hard to get at that. What did we do? We laid out ten lakhs in irrigation, another five lakhs in roads, a vast deal more in introducing European machinery and supervision; raised the whole sum by an average rate on cotton cultivation—and what is the result? Why, last year the outcome was more than double what it was before, and the price a halfpenny a pound lower at least.’

‘And what does that prove?’ asked Fotheringham, who never could be made to see anything that he chose not to see. ‘As I said before, where is the analogy?’ Blunt gave a cough which meant that he was uttering execrations internally, and took a large pinch of snuff. Fotheringham looked round with

the satisfied air of a man who had given a clencher to his argument, and whose opponents could not with decency profess any longer to be unconvinced.

‘ I am against it,’ said Cockshaw, ‘ because I am against everything. We are overgoverning the country. The one thing that India wants is to be let alone. We should take a leaf out of the books of our predecessors—collect our revenue, as small an one as possible, shun all changes like the devil—and let the people be.’

‘ That is out of the question,’ said Empson, whom thirty years of officialdom had still left an enthusiast at heart. “ Rest for India ” is the worst of all the false cries which beset and bewilder us ; it means, for one thing, a famine every ten years at least ; and

famines, you know, mean death to them and insolvency to us.'

'Of course,' said Fotheringham, sententiously, with the grand air of Æolus soothing the discordant winds, 'when Cockshaw said he was against everything he did not mean any indifference to the country. But we are running up terrible bills; you know, Empson, we got an awful snubbing from home about our deficit last year.'

'Well, but now about the Salt,' put in Blunt, whose task it seemed to keep everybody to the point in hand. 'This is no question of deficit. I say it will pay, and the Government of India will lend us the money fast enough if they can be made to think so too.'

'Well,' said Cockshaw, stubbornly lighting another cheroot, and getting out his

words between rapid puffs of smoke, 'it won't pay, you'll see, and Government will think as I do.'

'Then,' replied Blunt, 'you will excuse me for saying Government will think wrong, and you will have helped them. Have you examined the figures?'

'Yes,' said Cockshaw, with provoking placidity, 'and I think them, like all other statistics, completely fallacious. You have not been out here, Blunt, as long as we have.'

'No; but the laws of arithmetic are the same, whether I am here or not.'

'Well,' observed Fotheringham, 'I really do not see—forgive me, pray, for saying it—but, as senior member, I may perhaps be allowed the observation—I really do not see how Blunt can pretend to know anything about our Salt.'

‘ There is one thing I know about it,’ said Blunt to Empson as they drove home from the Board ; ‘ whatever it is, it is not Attic !’

While thus the battle raged within, Desvœux, who had come with the Agent to the Board, took an afternoon’s holiday, and found himself, by one of those lucky accidents with which Fortune favours every flirtation, in Mrs. Vereker’s drawing-room, where Maud had just arrived to have luncheon and spend the afternoon.

Now, Mrs. Vereker was a beauty, and, as a beauty should, kept a little court of her own in Dustypore, which, in its own way, was quite as distinct an authority as the Salt Board or the Agency itself. Her claims to sovereignty were considerable. She had the figure of a sylph, hair golden and profuse, and real. She had lovely liquid purple eyes,

into which whoever was rash enough to look was lost forthwith ; and a smile—but as to this the position of the present chronicler, as a married man and the father of a family, renders it impossible for him to describe it as it deserved. Suffice it to say that, even in a faded photograph, it has occasioned the partner of his bosom the acutest pangs, and it would be bad taste and inexpedient to say more than that gentlemen considered it bewitching, while many married ladies condemned it as an unmeaning simper of a very silly woman. She affected to be greatly surprised at Desvœux's arrival, and even to hesitate about letting him in ; but the slight constraint of her manner, and the flush that tinged her cheek, suggested the suspicion that the call was not altogether fortuitous.



‘How provoking,’ she said, when Desvœux made his appearance, ‘that you should just come this morning to spoil our *tête-à-tête*! Don’t you find, Miss Vernon, whatever one does in life, there is invariably a man *de trop*?’

‘No,’ cried Desvœux, gaily; ‘Providence has sent me kindly to rescue you both from a dull morning. Ladies have often told me that under such circumstances it is quite a relief to have a man come in to break the even flow of feminine gossip. Come, now, Miss Vernon, were you not pleased to see my carriage come up the drive?’

‘No, indeed,’ said Maud; ‘nothing could be more *mal à propos*. Mrs. Vereker was just going to show me a lovely new Paris bonnet, and now, you see, we must wait till you are gone!’

‘Then, indeed, you would hate me,’ answered Desvœux ; ‘but happily there is no necessity for that, as I happen to be a connoisseur in bonnets, and Mrs. Vereker would not be quite happy in wearing one till I had given my approval. She will go away now, you will see, and put it on for us to look at.’

‘Is not he conceited?’ said Mrs. Vereker, raining the influence of a bewitching smile upon her guests, and summoning, as she could at pleasure, the most ingenuous of blushes to her cheeks. ‘He thinks he is quite a first-rate judge of everything.’

‘Not of *everything*,’ said the other, ‘but of some things—Mrs. Vereker’s good looks, for instance—yes, from long and admiring contemplation of the subject! It would be hard indeed if one could not have an opinion

about what has given one so much pleasure, and, alas! so much suffering!’

Desvœux said this with the most sentimental air, and Mrs. Vereker seemed to take it quite as a matter of course.

‘Poor fellow!’ she said; ‘well, perhaps I will show you the bonnet after all, just to console you—am I not kind?’

‘You know,’ said Desvœux, ‘that you are dying to put it on. Pray defer your and our delectation no longer!’

‘Rude and disagreeable person!’ cried the other. ‘Suppose, Miss Vernon, we go off and look at it by ourselves, and have a good long chat, leaving him alone here to cultivate politeness?’

‘Yes,’ cried Maud, ‘let us. Here, Mr. Desvœux, is a very interesting report on something—education—no, irrigation—with

nice tables and plenty of figures. That will amuse you till we come back.'

'At any rate, don't turn a poor fellow out into such a hurricane as this,' said Desvœux, going to the window, and looking into the garden, where by this time a sand-storm was raging, and all the atmosphere thick and murky with great swirls of dust. 'I should spoil my complexion and my gloves, and very likely be choked into the bargain.'

'But it was just as bad when you came, and you did not mind it.'

'Hope irradiated the horizon,' cried Desvœux; 'but it was horrible. I have a perfect horror of sand—like the people in "Alice," you know—

They wept like anything to see

Such quantities of sand.

'If this were only cleared away,'

They said, 'it would be grand.'

‘If seven maids with seven mops  
Swept it for half a year,  
Do you suppose,’ the Walrus said,  
‘That they could get it clear?’  
‘I doubt it,’ said the Carpenter,  
And shed a bitter tear.

‘And I shall shed a bitter tear if you send me away. At any rate, let me stay to lunch, please, and have my horses sent round to the stable.’

‘Shall we let him?’ cried Mrs. Vereker, teasingly. ‘Well, if you do, you will have nothing but poached eggs and bottled beer. There is a little pudding, but only just big enough for Miss Vernon and me.’

‘I will give him a bit of mine,’ said Maud. ‘I vote that we let him stay, if he promises not to be impertinent.’

‘And I will show him my bonnet,’ cried the other, whose impatience to display her new finery was rapidly making way. ‘It is

just as well to see how things strike men, you know, and my *caro sposo* among his thousand virtues happens to be a perfect ignoramus on the point of dress. He knows and cares nothing about all my loveliest things.'

'Except,' said Desvœux, 'how much they cost. Well, there is a practical side which somebody must know about, I suppose, and a husband is just the person; but it is highly inartistic.'

'How did you know that I was here?' Maud asked, when Mrs. Vereker had left the room. 'And why are you not at the Agency doing your lessons?'

'Because we have an aviary of little birds at the Agency,' answered Desvœux, his manner instantly becoming several shades quieter and more affectionate, 'and one of them came and sung me a tune this morning and told me to go and take a holiday and

meet the person I like the best in the world.'

'Now,' said Mrs. Vereker, gleefully re-entering the room, with a cluster of lace and flowers artistically poised upon her shapely little head, 'is not that a duck, and don't I look adorable?'

'Quite a work of art,' cried Desvœux, with enthusiasm. 'Siren! why, already too dangerously fair, why deck yourself with fresh allurements for the fascination of a broken-hearted world? I am convinced Saint Simon Stylites would have come down from his pillar on the spot if he could but have seen it!'

'And confessed himself a gone coon from a moral point of view,' laughed Mrs. Vereker, despoiling herself of the work of art in question. 'And now let us have some

lunch ; and mind, Mr. Desvœux, you can only have a very little, because, you see, we did not expect you.'

Afterwards, when it was time for Maud to go, it was discovered that no carriage had arrived to take her home. 'What can I do?' she said, in despair. 'Felicia will be waiting to take me to the Camp. George promised to send back his office carriage here, the moment he got to the Board.'

'Then,' said Desvœux, with great presence of mind, 'he has obviously forgotten it, and I will drive you home. Let me order my horses ; they are quite steady.'

Maud looked at Mrs. Vereker—she felt a burning wish to go, and needed but the faintest encouragement. Felicia would, she knew, be not well pleased ; but then it was George's fault that she was unprovided



for, and it seemed hardly good-natured to reject so easy an escape from the embarrassment which his carelessness had produced.

‘I would come and sit in the back seat, to make it proper,’ cried Mrs. Vereker, ‘but that I am afraid of the sun. I tell you what: I will drive, and you can sit in the back seat; that will do capitally.’

‘Thank you,’ said Desvœux, with the most melancholy attempt at politeness, and his face sinking to zero.

‘Indeed, that is impossible!’ cried Maud. ‘I know you want to stay at home. I will go with Mr. Desvœux.’ And go accordingly they did, and on the way home Desvœux became, as was but natural, increasingly confidential. ‘This is my carriage,’ he explained, ‘for driving married ladies in—you see there is a seat behind—very far behind—and well

railed off, to put the husbands in and keep them in their proper place—quite in the background. It is so disagreeable when they lean over and try to join in the conversation; and people never know when they are *de trop*.'

'Ah, but,' said Maud, 'I don't like driving with you alone. I hear you are a very terrible person. People give you a very bad character.'

'I know,' answered her companion; 'girls are always jilting me, and treating me horribly badly, and then they say that it is all my fault. I dare say they have been telling you about Miss Fotheringham's affair, and making me out a monster, but it was she that was alone to blame.'

'Indeed,' said Maud, 'I heard that it made her very ill, and she had to be sent to

England, to be kept out of a consumption.'

'This was how it was,' said Desvœux: 'I adored her—quite adored her; I thought her an angel, and I think her one still, but with one defect—a sort of frantic jealousy, quite a mania, you know. Well, I had a friend—it happened to be a lady—for whom I had all the feelings of a brother. We had corresponded for years. I had sent her innumerable notes, letters, flowers, presents, you know. I had a few things that she had given me—a note or two, a glove, a flower, a photograph, perhaps—just the sort of thing, you know, that one sends——'

'To one's brother,' put in Maud. 'Yes; I know exactly.'

'Yes,' said Desvœux, in the most injured tone, 'and I used to lend her my ponies,

and, when she wanted it, to drive her. And what do you think that Miss Fotheringham was cruel, wild enough to ask? To give back all my little mementoes, to write no more notes, have no more drives; in fact, discard my oldest, dearest friend! I told her, of course, that it was impossible, impossible! Desvœux cried, getting quite excited over his wrongs. ‘“Cruel girl,” I said, “am I to seal my devotion to you by an infidelity to the kindest, tenderest, sweetest of beings?” Thereupon Miss Fotheringham became quite unreasonable, went into hysterics, sent me back a most lovely locket I had sent her only that morning, and Fotheringham *père* wrote me the most odious note, in his worst style, declaring that I was trifling! Trifling, indeed! and to ask me to give up my——’

‘Your sister!’ cried Maud; ‘it was hard

indeed! Well, here we are at home. Let me jump down quick and go in and get my scolding.'

'And I,' said Desvœux, 'will go to the Agency and get mine.'

Stolen waters are sweet, however; and it is to be feared that these two young people enjoyed their *tête-à-tête* none the less for the consideration that their elders would have prevented it if they had had the chance.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A CHAPTER OF DISCLOSURES.

For his thoughts !

Would they were blank sooner than filled with me.

MAUD did not exactly get a scolding, but Felicia looked extremely grave. Maud's high spirits were gone in an instant; the excitement which had enabled her to defy propriety hitherto deserted her at the door: the recklessness with which Desvœux always infected her had driven away with him in his mail-phaeton, and left her merely with the disagreeable consciousness of having acted foolishly and wrongly. Felicia knew

exactly how matters stood, and scarcely said a word. Her silence, however, was, Maud felt, the bitterest reproach.

‘Scold me, scold me, dear,’ she cried, the tears starting to her eyes; ‘only don’t look like that, and say something!’

‘Well,’ said Felicia, ‘first promise me never to drive alone with Mr. Desvœux.’

‘After all,’ suggested Maud, ‘it is a mere matter of appearances, and what do they signify?’

‘Some matters of appearance,’ said Felicia, ‘signify very much. Besides, this is something more than that. It is bad enough for you to be *seen* with him—what I really care about is your *being* with him at all.’

‘But,’ said Maud, ‘he is really very nice: he amuses me so much!’

‘Yes,’ answered the other, ‘he amuses one, but then it always hurts. His fun has a something, I don’t know what it is, but which is only just not offensive; and I don’t trust him a bit.’

‘But,’ Maud argued, ‘he is great friends with George, is he not?’

‘Not great friends,’ said Felicia; ‘they were at college together, and have worked in the same office for years, and are intimate like schoolboys, and George never says an unkind word of anyone; but I do not call them friends at all.’

‘No?’ said Maud, quite unconvinced, and feeling vexed at Felicia’s evident dislike for her companion. ‘Well, he’s a great friend of mine, so don’t abuse him, please.’

‘Nonsense, child!’ cried Felicia, in a fright. ‘You don’t know him in the least,



or you would not say that. To begin with, he is not quite a gentleman, you know.'

'Not a gentleman!' cried Maud, aghast. 'He seems to me a very fine one.'

'As fine as you please,' said Felicia, 'but not a thorough gentleman. Gentlemen never say things that hurt you or offend your taste. Now, with Mr. Desvœux I feel for ever in a fright lest he should say something I dislike; and I know he *thinks* things that I dislike.'

'I think you are prejudiced, Felicia. What he says seems to me all very nice.'

'Perhaps it is prejudice,' Felicia answered, 'but I think it all the same. I feel the difference with other people; Major Sutton, for instance.'

'He is your ideal, is he not?' cried Maud, blushing and laughing, for somehow

she was beginning to feel that Felicia had designs upon her.

‘Yes,’ Felicia said, in her fervent way ; ‘he is pure and true and chivalrous to the core : he seems to me made of quite other stuff from men like Mr. Desvœux.’

‘He is all made of solid gold,’ cried Maud, by this time in a teasing mood, ‘and Mr. Desvœux is plaster-of-Paris, and putty, and pinchbeck, and everything that is horrid. But he is very amusing, dearest Felicia, all the same, *and very nice*. I will not drive with him any more, of course, if you do not like it.’

Thereupon Maud, in a somewhat rebellious frame of mind, was about to go and take her things off, and was already half-way through the doorway, when she turned round and saw Felicia’s sweet, serene, re-

finer brow wearing a look of harassment and annoyance, and a sudden pang of remorse struck her that she should, in pure mischief, have been wounding a tender heart, and endangering a friendship with which she felt everything else in the world was but a straw in the balance. She rushed back, and flung her arms round her companion's neck.

‘Dearest Felicia,’ she said, ‘you know I would fly to the moon rather than do anything you did not like, or make you like me the tiniest atom less. I want to tell you something. You think, I know, that I am falling in love with Mr. Desvœux. Well, dear, I don't care for him *that!*’

Thereupon Maud clapped two remarkably pretty hands together in a manner highly expressive of the most light-hearted indifference, and Felicia felt that, at any rate,

she might console herself with the reflection that Maud was as yet quite heart-whole, and that, so far as Desvœux was concerned, Sutton's prospects were not endangered. The certainty, however, that Desvœux had selected Maud for his next flirtation, and that she felt no especial repugnance to the selection, made Felicia doubly anxious that her chosen hero should succeed, and her *protégée* be put beyond the reach of danger as soon as possible. But then Sutton proved provokingly unamenable to Felicia's kind designs upon him.

His continued bachelorhood was a mystery of which not even she possessed the key. It was not insensibility for every word, look, and gesture bespoke him more than ordinarily alive to all the charms which sway mankind. It certainly was not that

either the wish or the power to please were wanting; nobody was more courteous at heart, or more prompt to show it, or more universally popular: nor could it be want of opportunity; for, though he had been all his life fighting, marching, hurrying on busy missions from one wild outpost to another, on guard for months together at some dangerous spot where treachery or fanaticism rendered an explosion imminent; yet the busiest military life has its intervals of quiet, and the love-making of soldiers is proverbially expeditious. Was it, then, some old romance, some far-off English recollection, some face that had fascinated his boyhood, and forbade him, when a man, to think any other altogether lovely? Could the locket, which formed the single ornament where all else was of Spartan simplicity, have

told a tale of one of those catastrophes where love and hope and happiness get swamped in hopeless shipwreck? Was it that, absolutely unknown to both parties, his relations to Felicia filled too large a place in his heart for any other devotion to find room there? Was it that a widow sister who had been left with a tribe of profitless boys upon her hands, and to whom a remittance of Sutton's pay went every month, had made him think of marriage as an unattainable luxury?

Sutton, at any rate, remained without a wife, and showed no symptom of anxiety to find one. To those venturesome friends who were sufficiently familiar to rally him on the subject he replied, cheerfully enough, that his regiment was his wife, and that such a turbulent existence as his would make any other sort of spouse a most inconvenient appendage. Ladies experienced in

the arts of fascination knew instinctively that he was unassailable, and even the most intrepid and successful gave up the thoughts of conquest in despair. To be a sort of privileged brother to Felicia, to be the children's especial patron and ally, to sit chatting with Vernon far into the night with all the pleasant intimacy of family relationship, seemed to be all the domestic pleasures of which he stood in need. 'As well,' Felicia sighed, 'might some poor maiden waste her love upon the cold front of a marble Jove.'

Such was the man upon whom Felicia had essayed her first attempt at match-making; and such the man, too, with whom Maud, though she had buried the secret deep in the recesses of her heart—far even out of her own sight—had already begun to love with all the passionate violence of a first attachment.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## DESVŒUX MAKES THE RUNNING.

Free love, free field—we love but while we may :  
The words are hushed, their music is no more ;  
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away,  
New leaf, new life—the days of frost are o'er.  
New life, new love, to suit the newer day:  
New loves are sweet as those that went before,  
Free love, free field—we love but while we may.

FELICIA was beginning to find Maud a serious charge, and to be weighed down in spirit by the responsibility involved in her protection. It would have been easy enough to tell her not to flirt, but it was when Maud was unconscious and self-forgetful that she fascinated the most ; and how warn her against the exercise of attractions of which she never



thought, and the existence of which would have been a surprise to her? When, on the lawn, Maud's hat blew off and all her wealth of soft brown hair tumbled about her shoulders in picturesque disarray, and she stood, bright and eager and careless of the disaster, thinking only of the fortunes of the game, but beautiful, as every creature who came near her seemed to feel; when she was merriest in the midst of merry talk and made some saucy speech, and then blushed scarlet at her own audacity; when her intensity of enjoyment in things around her bespoke itself in every look and gesture; when the pleasure she gave seemed to infect her being, and she charmed others because she was herself in love with life, how warn her against all this? You might as well have preached to an April shower! Desvœux,

too, was not a lover likely to be easily discouraged or to let the grass grow beneath his feet. Both from temperament and policy he pressed upon a position where advantages seemed likely to be gained. Despite the very coolest welcomes, Felicia began to find him an inconveniently frequent visitor. An avowed foe to croquet, he appeared with provoking regularity at her Thursday afternoons, when the Dustypore world was collected to enjoy that innocent recreation on the lawn, and somehow he always contrived to be playing in Maud's game. Even at church, he put in an unexpected appearance, and sate through a discourse of three-quarters of an hour with a patience that was almost ostentatiously hypocritical. Then he would come and be so bright, natural, and amusing, and such good company, that Felicia was

frequently not near as chilling to him as she wished, and as she felt the occasion demanded. He was unlike anybody that Maud had ever met before. He seemed to take for granted that all existing institutions and customs were radically wrong, and that everybody knew it. 'Make love to married women? Of course; why not—what are pretty married women for? Hard upon the husbands? Not a bit; all the unfairness was the other way—the husbands have such tremendous advantages, that it is quite disheartening to fight against such odds: tradition and convention and the natural feminine conservatism all in favour of the husbands; and then the Churchmen, as they always do, taking their part too: it was so mean! No, no; if the husbands cannot take care of themselves they deserve the worst that can befall

them.' Or he would say, 'Go to church! Thank you, if Miss Vernon sings in the choir, and will say "How dye do?" to me as she comes out, I will go and welcome; but otherwise, *ça m'embête*, as the Frenchman said. I always was a fidget, Miss Vernon, and feel the most burning desire to chatter directly anyone tells me to hold my tongue; and then I'm argumentative, and hate all the speaking being on one side; and then—and then,—well, on the whole, I rather agree with a friend of mine, who said that he had only three reasons for not going to church—he disbelieved the history, disapproved the morality, and disliked the art.'

Maud used to laugh at these speeches; and though she did not like them, nor the man who made them, and understood what Felicia meant by saying that Desvœux's fun

had about it something which hurt one, it seemed quite natural to laugh at them. She observed too, before long, that they were seldom made when Felicia was by; and that Desvœux, if in higher spirits at Mrs. Vereker's than at the Vernons' house, was also several shades less circumspect in what he said, and divulged tastes and opinions which were concealed before her cousin. More than once, as Felicia came up, Desvœux had adroitly turned the conversation from some topic which he knew she would dislike; and Maud, who was guilelessness itself, had betrayed by flushing cheeks and embarrassed manner the fact of something having been concealed. On the whole, Felicia had never found the world harder to manage, or the little empire of her drawing-room less amenable to her sway. Her guests, somehow, would not be

what she wished. Desvœux, though behaving with marked deference to her wishes, and always sedulously polite, pleased her less and less; Maud's innocence and impulsiveness, however attractive, frequently produced embarrassments, which it required all Felicia's tact to overcome. Her husband, laconic and indolent, gave not the slightest help. Another ground on which she distressed herself (very unnecessarily, could she only have known) was, that Sutton, among other performers on Felicia's little stage, played not at all the brilliant part which she had mentally assigned him. The slightly contemptuous dislike for Desvœux which Felicia had often heard him express, and in which she greatly sympathised, though veiled under a rigid courtesy, was yet incompatible with cordiality or good cheer; and Desvœux, whose high

spirits nothing could put down, often appeared the pleasanter companion of the two. Sutton, in fact, had on more occasions than one come into collision with Desvœux in a manner which a less easy-going and light-hearted man would have found it difficult to forgive. Once, at mess, on a 'guest-night,' Desvœux had rattled out some offensive nonsense about women, and Sutton had got up, and, pushing his chair back unceremoniously, had marched silently away to the billiard-room in a manner which in him, the most chivalrous of hosts, implied a more than ordinarily vehement condemnation. Afterwards Desvœux had been given to understand that, if he came to the mess, he must not, in the Major's presence, at any rate, outrage good taste and good morals by any such displays. Then, at another time, there was a pretty

young woman—a sergeant's wife—to whom Desvœux showed an inclination to be polite. Sutton had told Desvœux that it must not be, in a quietly decisive way which he felt there was no disputing, though there was something in the other's authoritative air which was extremely galling. He could not be impertinent to Sutton, and he bore him no deep resentment; but he revenged himself by affecting to regard him as the ordinary 'plunger' of the period—necessary for purposes of defence, and a first-rate leader of native cavalry, but socially dull, and a fair object for an occasional irreverence. Sutton's tendency was to be more silent than usual when Desvœux was of the party; Desvœux, on the other hand, would not have let Sutton's or the prophet Jeremiah's presence act as a damper on spirits which were always at boil-



ing-point, and a temperament which was for ever effervescing into some more or less decorous form of mirth. The result was that the one man quite eclipsed the other, and tossed the ball of talk about with an ease and dexterity that was not always quite respectful to his less agile senior. One night, for instance, Maud, in a sudden freak of fancy, had set her heart upon a round of story-telling. 'I shall come last, of course,' she said, 'as I propose it, and by that time it will be bedtime; but, Major Sutton, you must tell us something about some of your battles, please; something very romantic and exciting.'

Sutton was the victim of a morbid modesty as to all his soldiering exploits, and would far rather have fought a battle than described it. 'Ah,' he said, 'but our fight-

ing out here is not at all romantic—it is mostly routine, you know, and not picturesque or amusing.'

'Yes, but,' said Maud, 'tell us something that *is* picturesque or amusing: a hair-breadth escape, or a forlorn hope, or a mine. I love accounts of mines. You dig and dig for weeks, you know, and then you're countermined, and hear the enemy digging near you; and then you put the powder in, and light the match, and run away, and then—now you go on!'

'And then there is a smash, I suppose,' laughed Sutton; 'but you know all about it better than I. I'm not a gunner—all my work is above-ground.'

'Well, then,' cried Maud, with the eager air of a child longing for a story, 'tell us

something above-ground. How did you get your Victoria Cross, now ?'

Maud, however, was not destined to get a story out of Sutton.

'There was nothing romantic about *that*, at any rate,' he said. 'It was at Mírabad. There was a cannon down at the end of a lane which was likely to be troublesome, and some of our fellows went down with me and spiked it. That was all!'

'Excuse me, Miss Vernon,' said Desvœux; 'Sutton's modesty spoils an excellent story. Let me tell it as it deserves.' And then he threw himself into a mock-tragical attitude.

'Go on,' said Maud, eagerly.

'The street-fighting at Mírabad,' said Desvœux, with a declamatory air, 'was the fiercest of the whole campaign——'

‘What campaign?’ asked Sutton.

‘The Mírabad campaign,’ replied the other, with great presence of mind, ‘in eighteen hundred and—, I forget the year—but never mind.’

‘Yes, never mind the year,’ said Maud; ‘go on.’

‘The enemy fought us inch by inch, and lane by lane; from every window poured a little volley: every house had to be stormed, hand-to-hand we fought our way, and so on. You know the sort of thing. Then, as we turned into the main street, puff! a great blaze and a roar, and a dense cloud of smoke, and smash came a cannon-ball into the midst of us—five or six men were knocked over—Tomkins’s horse lost a tail, Brown had his nose put out of joint, Smith was blown up to a

second-storey window—something must be done. But I am tiring you?’

‘No, no,’ cried Maud, ‘I like it—go on.’

‘Well, let me see. Oh, yes, something must be done. To put spurs to my Arab’s sides, to cut my way down through the astonished mob, to leap the barricade (it was only eight feet high, and armed with a *chevaux de frize*), to sabre the six gunners who were working the battery, was, I need hardly say, the work of a moment. Then a crushing blow from behind, and I remember nothing more till, a month later, I found myself, weak and wounded, in bed; and a lovely nun gave me some gruel, and told me that Mirabad was ours! “Where am I?” I exclaimed, for I felt so confused, and the nun looked so angelic, that I fancied I must have

gone to heaven. My companion, however, soon brought me to earth by—*et cætera, et cætera, et cætera.*'

'That is the sort of thing which happens in "Charles O'Malley,"' said Sutton; 'only Lever would have put Tippoo Sahib or Tantia Topee on the other side of the barricade, and I should have had to cut his head off and slaughter all his bodyguard before I got out again.'

'And then,' said Maud, 'the nun would have turned out to be some one.'

'But,' said Desvœux, 'how do you know that the nun did *not* turn out to be some one, if only I had chosen to fill up those *et cæteras*?'

'Well,' said Sutton, who apparently had had enough of the joke, 'that part of the story I will tell you myself. The nun was a male

one—my good friend Boldero, who took me into his quarters, looked after me for six weeks, till I got about again, and was as good a nurse as anyone could wish for.’

‘I should have liked to be the nun,’ Maud cried, moved by a sudden impulse, which brought the words out as the thought flashed into her mind, and turning crimson, as was her wont, before they were out of her mouth.

‘That is very kind of you,’ said Sutton, standing up, and defending her, as Maud felt, from all eyes but his own; ‘and you would have been a very charming nurse, and cured me, I daresay, even faster than Boldero. And now, Desvœux, go and sing us a song, as a *finale* to your story.’

Maud knew perfectly well that this was a mere diversion to save her from the confusion

of a thoughtless speech, and turn Desvœux's attention from her. It seemed quite natural, and of a piece with Sutton's watchful, sympathetic care, to give her all possible pleasure and to shield her from every shade of annoyance. A thrill of gratitude shot through her. There was a charm, a fascination, in protection so prompt, so delicate, so kind, compared with which all other attractions seemed faint indeed. That evening Maud went to bed with her heart in a tumult, and wept, she knew not wherefore, far into the night—only again and again the tears streamed out—the outcome, though as yet she knew it not, of that purest of all pure fountains, an innocent first love.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## TO THE HILLS!

However marred, and more than twice her years,  
Scarred with an ancient sword-cut on the cheek,  
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes,  
And loved him with that love which was her doom.

SUMMER was beginning to come on apace ; not summer as English people know it, the genial supplement to a cold and watery spring, with just enough heat about it to thaw the chills of winter out of one, but summer in its fiercest and cruellest aspect, breathing sulphurous blasts, glowing with intolerable radiance, begirt with whirlwinds of dust—the unsparing despot of a sultry world. The fields, but a few weeks ago

one great 'waveless plain' of ripening corn, had been stripped of their finery, and were now lying brown and blistering in the sun's eye; the dust lay deep on every road and path and wayside shrub, and seized every opportunity of getting itself whirled into miniature siroccos. More than once Maud and Felicia had been caught, not in a sweet May shower, stealing down amid bud and blossom, and leaving the world moist and fresh and fragrant behind it, but in rough, turbulent clouds of rushing sand, which shut out the sunshine and replaced the bright blue atmosphere with the lurid glare of an eclipse. Felicia's flowers had begun to droop, nor could all her care rescue the fresh green of her lawn from turning to a dingy brown. Already prudent housekeepers were busy with preparations against the evil day so

near at hand ; verandahs were guarded with folds of heavy matting, to shut out the intolerable light that would have forced a way through any ordinary barrier ; windows were replaced by fragrant screens of cuscus-grass, through which the hot air passing might lose a portion of its sting ; and one morning, when Maud came out, she found a host of labourers carrying a huge winnowing-machine to one side of the house, the object of which was, Vernon informed her, to manufacture air cool enough for panting Britons to exist in. Day by day some piece of attire was discarded as too intolerably heavy for endurance. The morning ride became a thing of the past, and even a drive at sunset too fatiguing to be quite enjoyable. Maud felt that she had never—not even when Miss Goodenough had locked her up for a whole

summer afternoon, to learn her 'duty to her neighbour'—known what exhaustion really meant till now.

The children were turning sadly white, and Felicia began to be anxious for their departure to the hills. Maud would of course go with them, and Vernon was to follow in a couple of months, when he could get his leave. Much as she hated leaving her husband, Felicia was on the whole extremely glad to go. The state of things at home disturbed her. Maud's outspoken susceptibility, Desvœux's impressionable and eager temperament, Sutton's unconsciousness of what she wanted him to do—the combination was one from which it was a relief in prospect to escape to the refuge of a new and unfamiliar society. Felicia's buoyant and hopeful nature saw in the promised change of scene

the almost certainty that somehow or other matters would seem less unpromising when looked at from the summits of Elysium.

For Elysium accordingly they started. Three primitive vehicles, whose battered sides and generally faded appearance spoke eloquently of the dust, heat, and bustle in which their turbulent existence was for the most part engaged, were dragged, one afternoon, each by a pair of highly rebellious ponies, with a vast deal of shouting, pushing, and execrating, into a convenient position before the Hall-door, and their tops loaded forthwith with that miscellaneous and profuse supply of baggage which every move in India necessarily involves, and which it is the especial glory of Indian servants to preserve in undiminished amplitude. Suffice it to say that it began with trunks and cradles,

went on with native nurses, and concluded with a goat. Vernon sat in the verandah, smoking a cheroot with characteristic composure, and interfering only when some pyramid of boxes seemed to be assuming proportions of perilous altitude. He was to travel with them, establish them at Elysium, and ride down sixty miles again by night—a performance of which no Dustyporean thought twice. Maud, to whom one of the creaking fabrics was assigned, in company with the two little girls, found that, the feat of clambering in and establishing herself once safely accomplished, the journey promised to be not altogether unluxurious. The Vernons' servants were experienced and devoted, and every detail of the journey was carefully foreseen. The interior of the carriage, well furnished with mattresses and

pillows, made an excellent bed ; a little army of servants gathered round to proffer aid and to give the Sahibs a passing salaam ; friendly carriages kept rolling in to say ‘ Goodbye.’ Sutton, who had been kept away on business, galloped in at the last moment, and seemed too much occupied in saying good-bye to Felicia to have much time for other thoughts. ‘ Goodbye,’ he said, in the most cheery tone, as he came to Maud’s carriage, and ‘ Goodbye, Uncle Jem!’ shouted the little girls, waving their adieux as best they might under the deep awning ; and then, after a frantic struggle for independent action on the part of the ponies, they were fairly off and spinning along the great, straight high road that stretches in unswerving course through so many hundred miles of English rule. The little girls were in the greatest glee, and

busy in signalling Uncle Jem for as long as possible. Maud, somehow, did not share their mirth—for the first time Sutton had seemed unkind, or near enough unkind, to give her pain. This ending of the pleasant time seemed to her an event which friendship ought not quite to have ignored. She looked back upon many happy hours, the brightest of her life, and the person who had made them bright evidently did not share her sentimental views about them in the least. Partings, Maud's heart told her, must surely be always sad, yet Sutton's voice had no tone of sadness in it. 'Stay—stay a little!' she could have cried with Imogen :

Were you but riding forth to air yourself,  
Such parting were too petty.

True, they were to meet in a few weeks ;  
but yet—but yet !



‘You’ve dot a big tear on your cheek,’ said one of her companions, with the merciless frankness of childhood.

‘Have I?’ said Maud. ‘Then it must be the dust that has gone into my eyes. How hot it is! Come, let us have some oranges!’

By this time evening was fast closing in, and Maud’s cheeks were soon safe from further observation. Before long her and her companions’ eyes were fast-closed by that kindly hand which secures to the most troubled of mankind the boon that one-third, at any rate, of existence shall be spent in peace. When they awoke the stars were shining bright, but the sky was already ruddy with the coming dawn, and Maud could see the giant mountain forms looming cold and majestic in the grey air above them. They alighted at a little wayside inn,

and found delicious cups of tea (the Indians' invariable morning luxury) awaiting them. Maud had sufficiently recovered her spirits to make a bold inroad on the bread-and-butter.

A mist hung about the country round, and it was a delightful, home-like sensation to shrink once again, as the cold mountain blasts came swishing down, throwing the wreaths of vapour here and there, and recalling the delicious reminiscence of a November fog. In a few moments the horses were ready, the children and nurses packed into palanquins, and the upward march began. These morning expeditions in the mountains are indescribably exhilarating. At every step you breathe a fresher atmosphere, and feel a new access of life, vigour, and enjoyment. Sweet little gushes of pure cold air meet you at the

turnings of the road and bid you welcome. The vegetation around is rich, profuse, and—long-forgotten charm—sparkling everywhere with dew. There has been a thunderstorm in the night, and the mountain-sides are streaming still: little cataracts come tumbling clamorously beside your path; below you a muddy stream is foaming and brawling, and collecting the tribute of a hundred torrents to swell the great flood that spreads, miles wide, in the plain. As the path rises you get a wider horizon, and presently the great champaign lies flashing and blinking in the morning's rays. Miles away overhead a tiny white thread shows the road along which in an hour or two you will be travelling, and a little speck at the summit, the cottage where your mid-day rest will be. Behind you lie heat, monotony, fatigue, hot

hours in sweltering courts, weary strugglings through the prose of officialdom, the tiresome warfare against sun and dust; around you and above, it is all enchanted ground; the air is full of pleasant sounds and sweet invisible influences; the genius of the woods breathes poetry about the scene, the mountain nymphs are dancing on yonder crest, and Puck and Oberon and Titania haunting in each delicious nook. Well may the first Englishman who toiled panting hitherwards from the reeking realms below have fancied himself half-way to Paradise, and have christened the crowning heights Elysium. Maud, at any rate, leaving the rest of the party behind, rode forward in an ecstasy of enjoyment.

. . . . .

They spent the hot hours of the day in a

sweet resting-place. Years afterwards the calmness of that pleasant day used to live in Maud's recollection; and though many scenes of bustle and trouble and fevered excitement had come between herself and it, yet the very thought of it used to soothe her. 'I have you, dear,' she would say to Felicia, 'in my mind's picture-gallery, set in a dozen different frames—scenes in which you played a part—and this is my favourite. I love you best of all in this; it cools and gladdens me to look at it.'

The scene, in fact, was a lovely one. On one side rose a vast amphitheatre of granite, rugged, solemn, precipitous; downwards, along the face of this, a careful eye might trace from point to point the little path up which the party were to make to-morrow's march. This mountain ridge separated them

from the Elysian Hills, and seemed to frown at them like some giant bulwark reared to guard the snowy solitudes beyond from human intrusion. On the other hand, fold upon fold, one sweet outline melting into another, here kissed by soft wreaths of cloud, here glittering clear and hard in the flood of light, stretched all the minor ranges, along which for fifty miles the traveller to the Elysians prepares himself for the final sublimity that lies beyond. In front, where the mountains parted, lay glistening in the sweltering horizon, and immeasurably below them, the great Indian plain, spread out as far as eye could follow it—a dim, hazy, monotonous panorama—varied only when occasionally a great river, swollen with the melting snows above, spread out for miles across the plain, and twinkled like an inland

lake as the sun's rays fell upon it, and suggestive, on the whole, of intolerable heat.

The hillside around was covered thick with forest growth of tropical luxuriance. On the heights above, a clump of rhododendrons glowed with a rosy glory; here, on a rugged precipice, a storm-stricken deodar spread its vast flat branches as if to brave the storm and the lightning strokes such as had before now seamed its bark. The path below was overhung with a dense growth of bamboo, each stem a miracle of grace, and growing at last to an inextricable jungle in the deep bosom of the mountain gorge. Fantastic creepers in fantastic exuberance tossed wildly about the crag's side, or hung festooning the roadside with a gorgeous natural tapestry. A hundred miles away the

everlasting snow-clad summits, which had stood out so clear in the grey morning, when they first emerged from their couch of clouds, were fading into faintness as the bright daylight poured about them. Just below the spot on which their camp was pitched there was a little spring and a drinking-place, and constant relays of cattle came tinkling up the road, and rested in the tall rocks' shadow for a drink, while the weary drivers sat chatting on the edge. Every now and then weird beings from the Interior, whose wild attire and unkempt aspect bespoke them as belonging to some aboriginal tribe, were to be seen staggering along under huge logs of timber felled in the great forests above, and now brought down to the confines of civilisation for human use. It was a new page in Nature's grand picture-book, and full of



charm. Maud, who was always very much alive to the outer world, was greatly impressed. Her nerves were over-wrought. She took Felicia's hand, and seemed to be in urgent need of imparting her excited mood to some one.

‘How beautiful this is!’ she cried; ‘how solemn, how solitary! Already all the world seems to be something unsubstantial, and the mountains the only reality.’

Felicia threw herself back upon the turf and gave a great sigh of relief.

‘I like these delicious gusts of air,’ she said, ‘fresh and pure from the snow-tops.’

‘Yes,’ cried Maud; ‘how serene and grand they look! No wonder the Alpine tourists go crazy about them, and break their necks in clambering about them bewildered with pleasure.’

How faintly flushed, how phantom fair  
Was Monte Rosa hanging there!  
A thousand shadowy pencilled valleys  
And snowy dells in a golden air!

And here is a whole horizon of Monte Rosas! I should like to stop a month here and devote myself to sketching.'

While they were chatting in the shade, a native lad, who had been standing on a neighbouring knoll, came running down to a picketed pony, and began hurriedly to prepare him for departure.

'What Sahib's horse?' Vernon asked with that imperative inquisitiveness that the superior race allows itself in India.

'Boldero Sahib,' replied the breathless groom; and before many minutes more 'Boldero Sahib' himself began to be apparent on the opposite hillside.

'The impetuous Boldero,' cried Vernon,

‘riding abroad, redressing human wrongs, and doing his best, as usual, to break his neck, as if there could by any possibility be anything worth hurrying about in the plains below. Now, Maud, you will see a real philanthropist in flesh and blood.’

Presently the tiny distant object had shaped itself into a man-and-horse, and in a quarter of an hour more Boldero came clattering into the yard, had slung himself out of the saddle in a moment, and was already preparing to mount his new horse, when he discovered the Vernons, and was introduced to Maud. He seemed to have broken like a whirlwind into the repose of the party. His servants were evidently well experienced in their master’s movements; the saddle had been speedily shifted, and the fresh horse was already ready for a start.

Boldero drank off a great beaker of cold water. Maud's first impression was that he looked extremely handsome and extremely hot, and in better spirits and a greater hurry than she had ever seen anyone in in her life. Vernon, after first greetings, had speedily resumed his attitude of profound repose, and evidently had no intention of being infected with bustle.

'Come, Boldero,' he said, 'do, for goodness sake, send away your horse and wait here and have some lunch, instead of flying off in such a madman's hurry. India, which has already waited several thousand years for your arrival to reform her, can, no doubt, dispense with you for twenty minutes more; and Fortune does not send good meetings every day.'

'Yes, Mr. Boldero,' said Felicia, 'and I

have just been making a salad, which I am delighted you have arrived to admire; and I daresay you have half-a-dozen new ferns to show me.'

'I am pledged to be at Dustypore tomorrow, and ought to be ten miles further on my way by this time,' said Boldero. 'However, there is a glorious moon all through the night, and this delightful Doongla Gully seems set as a snare to beguile one into loitering by the way. What a sweet little oasis it is among all the gloom of the mountains!'

'Now, Maud,' said Vernon, 'I'll give you an idea of what the virtuous civilian does. He rides all night, he works all day.'

'Or rather,' said Boldero, who had as much dislike as the rest of the army of good fellows to being the topic of conversation,

‘by night he dances, by day he plays at Badminton. My visit to the Viceroy was nothing, except for the solemnity of the affair.’

‘Well,’ answered Vernon, ‘and now you come just in time to give my cousin a lesson in water-colours. You must know, Maud, that Mr. Boldero carried off the prize at Elysium for a mountain-sketch last year. Now, Boldero, be good-natured, and tell the mystery of your mountain skies, which, though I deny their fidelity, are, I must admit, as beautiful as the real ones.’

‘Will you?’ said Maud, her eyes flashing out and her colour coming at the mere thought of what she especially desired.

‘Will I not?’ Boldero said, with alacrity. ‘What pleasanter afternoon’s work could Fortune send one?’ And thereupon Maud’s sketch-book was produced.

‘Did you ever see such a daub?’ she cried. ‘It looks worse now it is dry than when I did it. It is so provoking! I feel the scenes—I have them all beautifully in my mind, and then come those horrid, hard, blotchy heaps. Just look at this odious mountain! Alas! alas!’ Maud went on ruthlessly blotting out her morning’s work, which, to tell the truth, did not deserve immortality.

‘You made it a little too blue,’ said her tutor. ‘See, now; I will tone it down for you in a minute.’

‘No, no,’ cried Maud; ‘let us have something fresh, that I have not desecrated by a caricature. Here, this in front of us will be lovely.’

‘See,’ said Boldero; ‘we will have that little bit of dark shade, and that jolly little cloud overhead.’

Maud's face glowed with pleasure, and her companion's last thought of getting in time to Dustypore disappeared.

Before the sketch was done the evening shadows were already fast climbing up the mountain's side; the valley's short day was over; cold masses of vapour were gathering about the crags; and the moon, that was to light the traveller through his night-long journey, was sailing, pale and ghost-like, overhead. Boldero waved them a last farewell as he disappeared round the opposite hillside, and seemed to Maud's excited imagination like some knight-errant riding down into the gloom.



## CHAPTER XV.

## A DISTRICT OFFICER.

Their aches, hopes,  
 Their pangs of love, with other incident throes,  
 That nature's fragile vessel doth sustain  
 In life's uncertain voyage.—*Timon of Athens.*

BOLDERO was one of the Queen's good bargains. His mind teemed with schemes for the regeneration of mankind ; disappointment could not damp his hopefulness, nor difficulty cool his zeal ; he was an enthusiast for improvement, and the firmest believer in its possibility. Against stupidity, obstinacy, the blunders of routine, official *vis inertiae*, he waged a warfare which, if not always discreet,

was sufficiently vigorous to plague his opponents.

‘ See,’ cries Mr. Browning’s philanthropist,

I have drawn a pattern on my nail,  
And I will carve the world fresh after it.

Boldero’s nails were absolutely covered with new patterns, and the little bit of the world on which he was able to operate was continually being carved into some improved condition. Nature having gifted him with courage, high spirit, resource, inventiveness, enterprise, and, precious gift, administrative effectiveness, and Fortune and the Staff Corps having guided his steps from a frontier regiment to a civilian appointment in the Sandy Tracts, his importance was speedily appreciated. Wherever he looked at the machinery about him he saw things out of gear, and working badly, and he forthwith

became possessed with devices to improve them. He saw material, money, time, wasted; wheel catching against wheel, and producing all sorts of bad results by the friction; office coming to dead-lock with office; one blundering head knocking against another; wants to which no one attended; wrongs which no one avenged; sufferings to which no hand brought relief. Some men see such things, and acquiesce in them as inevitable, or relieve themselves by cynical remarks on the best of all possible worlds. Boldero felt it all as a personal misfortune, and was incapable of acquiescence. Thus he was for ever discovering grievances, which, when once discovered, no one could deny. His reports to Government sent a little shudder through the Chief Secretary's soul.

The Salt Board regarded him with especial disfavour. Cockshaw cursed him for the long correspondence he involved. Fotheringham thought him dangerous, rash, Quixotic. Even Blunt accorded him but a scanty approval, Blunt's view being always the rough, commonplace, and unsentimental, and Boldero's projects involving a constant temptation to expenditure. But the Agent was a finer judge of character than any of them, and his keen eye speedily detected Boldero's rare merits, and his fitness for responsible employment. Boldero had more than justified the Agent's hopes, and accordingly moved rapidly up from one post to another, and was now acting as Chief Magistrate of the district next to Dustypore. Here his energetic temperament had the fullest play. He built, he planted, he

drained. Sunrise found him ever in the saddle. He drove his Municipal Committee wild with projects of reform water supply, vaccination, canals, maps, and public gardens. He fulminated the most furious orders; plunged into all sorts of controversies, was always waging war in some quarter or other, and manufactured for himself even a hotter world than Nature had provided ready-made. He offended the doctors by invading the hospitals and pointing out how the patients were killed by defective arrangements; the Chaplain, by objecting to the ventilation of the church and the length of the sermons; the Educational Department by a savage tirade on the schools; and the General in command by a bold assault on the drainage of the barracks. Altogether a bustling, joyous, irrepressible sort of man, and, as the

Agent knew, a perfect treasure in a land where energy and enthusiasm are hard to keep at boiling heat, and where to get a thing done, despite the piles of official correspondence it gets buried under, is a result as precious as it is difficult of achievement.

When he first came to India he had been for a couple of years in Sutton's regiment, and at the time of Sutton's illness the two had almost lived together. The intimacy so formed had ripened into a cordial friendship, and Boldero had thus become a not unfrequent visitor at the Vernons' house, where though her husband pronounced him an enthusiastic bore, Felicia ever accorded him a kindly welcome. He had now, however, carried away with him that which speedily cured him of enthusiasm, and, rather, forbade him to feel enthusiastic about

any thing but one. With his accustomed earnest precipitancy he had fallen deeply in love with Maud the first moment he had seen her, and all his afternoon had been spent in that paradise which springs into sudden existence beneath a happy lover's feet. Maud had been delighted with him for being so handsome, so good-natured, and the latest comer. And, then, was not he Sutton's friend, whose care and kindness had brought him from Death's door? Maud thought of this with a gush of interest, and rained the sweetest and most gracious smiles upon him in consequence. Those bright looks pursued him down the mountain's side the livelong night, and next day into court and office and all the hundred businesses of a busy official's day. So bright were they, even in recollection, that all the brightness

seemed to have faded out of everything else. The details of his District, lately so full of interest, had become the dreariest routine. Improvements which, when last he thought of them, seemed of vital importance, faded away into uselessness or impossibility. A great pile of papers stood, ranged upon the study table, inviting disposal. A week ago Boldero would have fallen upon them like a glutton on some favourite repast, and driven through them with alacrity and enjoyment. Now he had not the heart to touch them. A week ago the plains, with all their drawbacks, were pleasanter far, for a healthy man, than the indolent comforts and dull frivolities of a Hill station. Now, alas! Elysium was the only place where life—any life, that is, which deserved the name—was to be had.

Meanwhile, the object of his devotion



was conscious only of having had a very pleasant afternoon and added one more to an already ample list of agreeable acquaintances. By the time she arrived at Elysium, next day, Boldero had faded into indistinctness, and his chance meeting with them figured in Maud's thoughts only as one, and not the most striking, incident of a journey which had been to her full of things new, interesting, and picturesque.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## ELYSIUM.

For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurled  
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly  
    curled  
Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming wold.

THE conquering races who, in one age or another, have owned the fair plains of Hindostan have successively made the discovery that there are portions of the year when their magnificent possession had best be contemplated from a respectful distance. Some monarchs retired from the summer to the exquisite Cashmir valleys. Some to cool plateaux in the far interior. The latest administrators of the country have solved the

problem by perching, through the hot season, on the summits of a craggy range, and by performing the functions of Government at an altitude of 7,000 feet above the sea.

The fact that the highest officials in the country, having a large amount of hard work to do, should prefer to do it in an invigorating mountain atmosphere, rather than amid swamps, steam, and fever in the plains below, is not, of course, surprising. The only matter of regret is, that the obvious advantages, public and private, of an European climate for half the year can, from the nature of things, be enjoyed by so tiny a fraction of the official world. As it is, the annual removal of the Government to its summer quarters gives rise too often to a little outburst of unreasonable though not

unnatural jealousy ; and Indian journalists, who are necessarily closely pinned to the plains, are never tired of inveighing against the 'Capua' of the British rule. The truth is, however, that if Hannibal's soldiers had worked half as hard at Capua as English officials do at Elysium, nothing but good could have resulted from their sojourn in that agreeable resting-place. Of the holiday-makers it may safely be said that, in nine cases out of ten, they have earned, by long months of monotonous, laborious, and almost solitary life, a good right to all the refreshment of body and soul that a brief interval of cool breezes, new faces, and an amusing society can give them. The 'Jack' of the Civil Service is often a dull boy because the stern *régime* of 'all work and no play' is too rigorously enforced upon him. Let no one,

therefore, grudge him his few weeks of rest and merry-making, or mock at the profuse homage with which the goddess Terpsichore is adored by her modern votaries on the Himalayan heights.

Elysium, indeed, enchants one on the first approach. You clamber for weary miles up a long, blazing ascent, where even the early morning sun seems to sting and pierce. As the road turns, you enter suddenly a sweet depth of shade formed by thick growths of ilex and rhododendron, from the breaks in which you look out at ease upon the blazing day beyond. Dotted all about the road, above and below, perched on every convenient rock or level ridge of soil, or sometimes built up on a framework of piles, are the homes of the Elysians, not, alas! the ideals which the imagination would con-

ceive of the abodes of the blest, but seaside lodgings, of a by no means first-rate order, with precipices, clouds, and rain, instead of sea. Presently the road fails at a great chasm in the mountain-side, and the horses' feet clatter over a frail-looking structure of planks and scaffolding hanging on the mountain's edge. This is merely a landslip, an event too common even to be observed. Each heavy rainfall, however, washes an appreciable fraction of the Elysian summits to the depths below, and leaves the craggy sides barer and steeper than ever. Then, emerging from the ilex grove, the traveller passes to a little Mall, where the fashionable world assembles for mutual deliberation, and the tide of life, business, and gaiety flows fast and strong. There is something in the air of the place which bespeaks the close

neighbourhood of the Sovereign rule, the august climax of the official hierarchy. Servants, brilliant in scarlet-and-gold, are hurrying hither and thither. Here some Rajah, petty monarch of the surrounding ranges or the fat plains below, attended with his mimic court and tatterdemalion cavalry, is marching in state to pay his homage to the 'great Lord Sahib.' Here some grand lady, whose gorgeous attire and liveried retinue bespeak her sublime position, is constrained to bate her greatness to the point of being carried, slung like the grapes of Eschol, on a pole, and borne on sturdy peasants' shoulders, to pay a round of the ceremonious visits which etiquette enjoins upon her. Officers, secretaries, aides-de-camp come bustling by on mountain-ponies, each busy on his own behest. The energetic army of morning callers

are already in the field. A dozen palanquins gathered at Madame Fifini's, the Elysian 'Worth,' announce the fact that as many ladies are hard at work within, running up long bills for their husbands, and equipping themselves for conquest at the next Government House 'at home.' Smartly-furnished shops glitter with all the latest finery of Paris and London, and ladies go jogging along on their bearers' shoulders, gay enough for a London garden-party in July. In the midst of all, the solid basis on which so huge a structure of business, pomp, and pleasure is erected, clumps the British Private, brushed, buttoned, and rigid, with a loud, heavy tread which contrasts strangely with the noiselessly moving crowd around him, and bespeaks his conscious superiority to a race of beings whom, with a lordly indifference to minute



ethnological distinctions, he designates collectively as 'Moors.'

Some servants were waiting at the entrance of the place to conduct the Vernons to their home, and before many minutes the travellers were standing in the balcony, looking out on the steep slopes of green foliage below them and noble snow-ranges which bounded the entire horizon. Maud soon rushed off to explore the house, and Felicia made her way to the garden, to see how many of last summer's plants the winter had spared to her. Presently she came in, with dew-bedrenched sleeves and gloves, and an armful of sparkling roses, geraniums, and heliotropes, and deposited them joyously in a heap on the table.

'There,' she cried, 'is my first fruit-offering. Bury your face in them, George, and do

homage, as I have been doing, to the Genius of the Hills! Come here, babies, and be crowned.'

Felicia knelt down and stuck the children's hair full of flowers, till each looked as gaudy as a little Queen of May. Her husband came and stood over them and watched the scene.

'Now,' he said, 'Felicia, you ought to be quite happy—you have your children and your flowers to adore at once.'

'And my husband,' said Felicia, looking up at him, with her sweet, radiant smile. 'And, oh dear, how I wish you had not to go down again to-night! Do you know, George, I mind each separation worse than the last? Next summer we will send the children straight to "the Gully," and we will stay comfortably together.'

Maud came back in the highest spirits.

‘Look here,’ she said, showing a handful of snow, and fingers red and blue with unaccustomed cold—‘how nice it is to feel it once again! And what nectar the air is! And, George, actually, strawberries!’

‘Yes,’ said Vernon, ‘and cream, and plenty of both. Is it not enchanting?’

‘You shall have some flowers too, dear,’ cried Maud, who seldom missed an opportunity of petting Felicia and letting her love run out in some pretty act or speech. ‘See, this rose was made for me to deck you with. Does she not look charming, George?’

‘Hush!’ said George; ‘we shall make her and the little girls too as vain as possible. Now, as I suppose nobody means to crown me, I vote that you go and get ready for breakfast, and I will prepare Maud a plate of

strawberries-and-cream, by way of beginning the feast.'

That morning lived ever afterwards in Maud's thoughts as one of the times when the world looked brightest to her. Everything was full of excitement, interest, and keen pleasure. If, from time to time, a thought of Sutton set her heart beating, it was more that she had learnt to worship him as an ideal of all that was most charming in man than that his absence cost her any serious regret. It had given her a pang to part, and to feel how little of a pang it had given him. He had been almost unconscious of her departure; he had been certainly quite, quite indifferent to it. Such insensibility was a little speck on the otherwise spotless perfection; but Maud's heart was too light for this to weigh it down for long. A long, charming

vista of enjoyment was opening before her. Half-a-dozen people, she knew, were awaiting her arrival with impatience, and thought Elysium not quite Elysium till she came. Before the morning was over there would come, so her prophetic soul announced, kind familiar faces, all the brighter for her presence, with all sorts of delightful projects, often talked of beforehand, now to come into actual fruition; rides, picnics, dances, theatricals, and (thrilling thought!) a fancy ball, at which Maud had already found herself twenty times whirling in anticipated vales, each more enchanting than the last. Who could contemplate such a prospect with equanimity? or whose heart have room for gloomy thoughts with so many bright dreams to crush them out? Then, presently, there came a note from Mrs. Vereker bidding her

a cordial welcome, and threatening her high displeasure if Maud's first visit was not to her. To Mrs. Vereker's accordingly they went, and found her in a little cottage, romantically stuck into a cleft in the rocks, with a cataract of honeysuckle tumbling all about a wooden porch, and a view of the mountains which even her adorers, burning to behold herself, were yet constrained to stop and look at. There was a little court, with a wooden railing to guard the edge, and geraniums blazing all about it, where a succession of adorers' ponies waited while their owners did homage within. Through that convenient cranny in the foliage the deity, unseen, could spy the approaching visitor and decide betimes whether she would be at home or not. Now she was unquestionably at home, and met them at the door with

merry greetings. She led them in, and showed them her drawing-room, the very home of innocence and refined propriety. 'My husband does not wish me to mope when he is away,' she said, with a charming simple smile ; and, to do her justice, in this respect, at any rate, she obeyed his wishes. If the loveliest, freshest bonnets, the daintiest gloves, the most picturesque mountain costumes, a succession of bewildering head-dresses, could rescue a widowed soul from melancholy, Mrs. Vereker had no right to gloom ; nor was hers the only nature that was cheered, for all mankind conspired to assure her that she was the most bewitching of her sex. Turn where she would she found a host of willing courtiers, who thought their assiduous services well rewarded with a single smile. She looked at the world

through her beautiful purple eyes, and saw it prostrate at her feet.

Even Felicia was captivated, despite her own convictions; and Vernon alone of the party declared her a little ogling hypocrite, and pronounced himself unable to understand how anyone could think her even pretty.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## A BATTLE ROYAL.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer——

LEAVING the celestials to their business and pleasures in the upper regions, the Historic Muse must now descend into the plains and record the wrath of Blunt, and the more than Homeric combats which, stirred by Até in her most malignant mood, that irrepressible official waged against his luckless compeers at the Board. The outbreak was horribly inopportune. The weather was becoming disagreeably hot; Cockshaw was looking up his rifles and fishing-rods for a

month's run into Cashmir; Fotheringham was preparing to retire behind his cuscus entrenchments, and æstivate in placidity till the moment arrived for going to the hills; but the black soul of Blunt was impervious to climatic influences; his craving for information became more insatiable, his contempt for Fotheringham's platitudes and Strutt's tall writing less and less disguised. The further Blunt looked into the Rumble Chunder affair the keener grew his sense of the feeble, round about, inaccurate, unthorough way in which it had been treated by everyone who had essayed to take it in hand. 'The way to handle nettles,' he said, roughly, 'is to take tight hold of them, and bear what stinging you get and have done with it.'

Neither Fotheringham nor Cockshaw

were in the least disposed to handle official nettles, or to admit the force of Blunt's logic as applied to themselves.

'Some nettles,' Fotheringham said, with dignified composure, 'will not bear handling at all. Many of our Indian institutions you will find, Blunt, require a course of treatment always unpopular with ardent physicians; that, namely, of being left alone.'

'Aye,' said Cockshaw, blowing a great stream of smoke from his mouth, as if he wished he could treat Blunt and his schemes in like fashion; 'leave well alone, Blunt. What the deuce is it you are driving at?'

'I'll tell you what I am driving at,' said Blunt: 'I want to be out of the muddle in which we have been going on all these years, just for want of a little explicitness and courage.'

‘Excuse me,’ said Fotheringham, testily ; ‘I am not aware that the conquerors and administrators of the Sandy Tracts have ever been accused of deficiency in courage, at any rate.’

‘Of course not,’ answered the other ; ‘no one supposes anything of the sort ; but what I mean is that no one has faced the consequences of that confounded Proclamation of the Governor-General in a plain, business-like way, and seen what it really comes to.’

Now, the Governor-General’s Proclamation was regarded in official circles at Dustypore with a sort of traditional awe, as something almost sacred. Fotheringham had often spoken of it as the Magna Charta of the Sandy Tracts, and Strutt generally quoted it in the peroration of his Annual Report : nothing, accordingly, could be less

congenial to his audience than Blunt's coarse, off-handed, disrespectful way of referring to it. Fotheringham's whole nature was in arms against the idea of this rash, irreverential intruder handling with such jaunty freedom and contempt the things which he had all his life been accustomed to treat and to see treated with profound respect. The moment had now come when to put up with Blunt any longer would, he thought, be simple weakness; the cup of Blunt's misdeeds at last was full; and Fotheringham, his patience fairly at an end, pale and excited, spoke, and spoke in wrath.

'I must beg,' he said, in a tone of aggrieved dignity which Blunt especially resented, 'to remind our junior colleague that there are some things of which his inexperience of the country renders it impossible

for him to be a competent judge, and of which, when he knows them better, he will probably think and speak with more respect. This Rumble Chunder Grant is one of them. Cockshaw and I have been at work at it for twenty years : we know the places, the people, the language, the feeling it excites, the dangers it may provoke. The Proclamation, which Blunt is pleased to describe as ‘confounded,’ was, we know, a high-minded, well-considered act of a great statesman, and has been the foundation-stone of all peace, prosperity, and civilisation in the province. It all seems clear to you, my good sir, because—forgive me for saying it—you do not see the intricacies of the matter, and are incapable of appreciating its bearings. For my part——’

‘Come, come, Fotheringham,’ said Cock-

shaw, who had been looking nervously at his watch, and knew that it wanted only seven minutes to the hour at which his afternoon game of racquets should begin, 'don't let us drift into a quarrel. As to speaking rudely of the Proclamation, it is as bad as the man who damned the North Pole, you know—no harm is done to anyone by that. Blunt is not so nervous about the matter as we are, because he has not had such a deal of bother over it as we have had. My idea is that we have gone into it of late quite as far as we can just now. Suppose we drop it for the present, and take it up again in the cold weather?'

'I object altogether,' Blunt said, in a dogged way, which made Cockshaw give up his chance of racquets that day as desperate. 'That system of postponements is one of the

objectionable practices which I especially deprecate. Whenever any of us get hold of a thing which he does not fancy, or cannot or will not understand, he puts it into his box and burkes it, and no more is heard of it for a twelvemonth. I would sooner take the chance of going wrong than the certainty of doing nothing.'

'And I,' answered Cockshaw, lighting a new cheroot with the remaining fraction of his old one, 'would sooner take the risk of a little delay than the certainty of going wrong, as you will do to a moral certainty if you are in such a devil of a hurry.'

'Please, Cockshaw,' said Fotheringham, to whom his colleague's cheroots and bad language were a chronic affliction, 'do not lose your temper. For my part, I was going to observe when you interrupted me just



now, I really do not know what it is that Blunt imagines could be done.'

'This could be done,' Blunt said—'we could bring things to a head, and know exactly how we stand; ascertain the claims, the rights, and at what prices we could buy the owners of them out.'

'My good sir,' Fotheringham exclaimed, by this time fairly in a passion, 'that is exactly what all of us have been trying to do for the last ten years, and you talk as if it could be done out of hand.'

'And so it could,' cried Blunt, 'if anyone would only resolve to do it. I tell you what: let me have Whisp and a few clerks and translators, and hold a local commission, and I will go into the District myself and knock my way through the matter somehow or other.'

‘You will find it infernally hot,’ said Cockshaw.

‘You will have a rising on the frontier,’ said Fotheringham, ‘mark my words, and come back deeper in difficulties than ever.’

However, Blunt at last got his way, and went off trotting on his cob; Cockshaw escaped gleefully to the racquet-court; and Fotheringham sat sadly at the Board-room, conscious of present harassment and impending disaster. Both he and Blunt used to carry away with them to their domestic circles the traces of the conflicts in which they had been engaged: both reached their homes in a truly pitiable state of mind and body whenever this hateful Rumble Chunder Grant affair was on hand: both ladies knew only too well the days when it formed part of the programme. Blunt used to stamp about

and abuse the servants, emphasising his language with various vehement British expletives, quaffing large goblets of brandy and soda-water, as if to assuage an inward fury, and making no secret of his opinion that Fotheringham was a donkey. Fotheringham, on the other hand, retired to his sofa, called for sal-volatile, had both the Misses Fotheringham to bathe his temples with toilet-vinegar, and breathed a hint that poor Blunt was a terribly uncouth fellow, and that it was extremely disagreeable to have to do with people who, not being gentlemen themselves, could not understand what gentlemen felt. Mrs. Fotheringham thought so too, and began, on her part, not to love Mrs. Blunt.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## GAUDIA IN EXCELSIS.

Quis non malarum quas Amor curas habet  
Hæc inter obliviscitur ?

BEFORE many weeks had passed Sutton and Desvœux came up to Elysium for their holidays, and Maud's cup of pleasure began to overflow. Boldero, moreover, to the great surprise of everyone, discovered that the plains were telling seriously on his constitution, and, despite the lamentations of his Commissioner, who was at his wits' end to find a satisfactory substitute, insisted on carrying out the doctor's recommendation to try a change of air.

‘I am sorry you are ill,’ the Commissioner said, ‘and overworked, but what on earth am I to do without you? No one understands anything about our arterial drainage scheme but you; and who is to open the new cattle fair? And then there is that lakh of saplings we had determined to plant out in the rains—my dear fellow, don’t go till October, at any rate.’

But Boldero was inexorable: the arterial drainage of the Sandy Tracts, new cattle fairs, and even the delicious prospect of planting out a hundred thousand trees in a region where a tree was almost as great a phenomenon as Dr. Johnson found it in the Hebrides—all seemed to him but as hollow dreams, which fell meaningless on the ear, when compared with the solid reality of a personal romance. To go to Elysium, to

see Maud again, to hear her joyous laugh, to watch her eyes light up with pleasure, and the colour coming and going in her cheeks, as each new turn of feeling swayed her this way or that ; to hold her hand in his, and feel a subtle, electric influence flashing from her to him and stirring every nerve and fibre of his being into new existence ; and then to win this sweet creature to him with a tender avowal of devotion, and the sweet coercion of passionate attachment ; to bring her to irradiate a dreary, solitary life with youth, beauty, freshness, everything that Boldero now discovered that his own existence wanted ; this was the dream which filled his waking and sleeping thoughts, or, rather, this was the reality, and everything else was dream-land ; far off, unsubstantial, unsatisfying. What, to a man in this mood, are reclama-

tion schemes, and irrigation projects, and all the vexatious details involved in improving thankless people against their wills, educating those who do not want to be taught, and aiming at a chimerical Golden Age, which no one is sure can ever come, and which, at any rate, we shall never see? Boldero confessed to himself that a morning's sketching on the mountain's side with Maud was, as far as his interest about the matter went, worth more than all the Golden Ages that poets have sung or philanthropists devised. The utmost concession that the Commissioner could get out of him was that he would go only for a fortnight. And so to Elysium he came among the rest.

There may be natures to whom, according to Sir Cornwall Lewis's dictum, life would be tolerable but for its enjoyments ;

but the Elysiumites, assuredly, are not of the number. They go about pleasure-hunting with a vehemence the stronger and keener for the long period of partial or total abstinence from amusement which most of them have undergone. A soldier's wife who has been for months marching up and down a desert frontier, with no attainable form of excitement but the agreeable possibility of having one's throat cut in the night or a bullet cleverly lodged in one from behind a rock overhead—the engineer who has been for months out in camp with little companionship but that of theodolites and maps—the forest superintendent who has spent a twelvemonth among the deodars in some nameless Himalayan gorge—the civilian who has carried off his bride to a solitary existence in some far-off Mofussil station, where



the only European is perhaps an excise officer or policeman—people like these acquire a keen relish for any change of scene, and rush into a holiday with the enthusiasm of long-imprisoned schoolboys. Nothing damps their ardour—not even Himalayan rain, which effectually damps everything else. There is a ball, for instance, at the Club House; it is raining cataracts, and has been doing so for twenty hours. The mountain paths are knee-deep in mud, and swept by many a turgid torrent rattling from above. Great masses of thunder-cloud come looming up, rumbling, crashing, and blazing upon a sodden, reeking world. The night is black as Tartarus, save when the frequent flashes light it up with a momentary glare. The road is steep, rough, and not too safe. Carriages, of course, there are none. A false step might send you

several thousand feet down the precipice into the valley below. Will all this prevent Jones the Collector, and Brown the Policeman, and Smith of the Irregular Cavalry putting their respective ladies into palanquins, mounting their ponies like men, and finding their way, through field and flood, to the scene of dissipation? Each will ensconce himself in a panoply of indiarubber, and require a great deal of peeling before becoming presentable in a ballroom; but each will get himself peeled, and dance till four o'clock. The ladies will emerge from their palanquins as fresh and bright and ambrosial as lace and tarlatan can make them. Mrs. Jones, if she would only tell the truth, has already more than half-filled up her card with engagements. Smith and his wife have never been at a dance since the night he

proposed to her at the Woolwich ball, and feel quite romantic at the prospect of a valse together. Mrs. Brown will meet half-a-dozen particular friends who are dying to see her, and whom she is not averse to see. The night outside is Tartarean, certainly, but within there is nothing but light, music, and mirth. The band crashes out and drowns the patter of the rain above; the Viceroy, towering like a Homeric chief among his peers, mingles with the throng, and is valsing with Felicia. Boldero has reached the seventh heaven of his hopes, and actually has possession of Maud's hand, and has her heart beating close to his own. Desvœux looks reproachfully at her over Mrs. Vereker's shoulder as they go whirling by—a hundred happy hearts are pulsating with excitement and pleasure, drowning the cares of

existence in such transient oblivion as may be manufactured out of fiddlers and champagne.

Is this the race which proclaims itself inadequate at amusement, and which, historians gravely assure us, loves to take its very pleasures sadly? Are these the melancholy beings whose gloom is supposed to have acquired a still sadder tinge from the sad routine of Eastern life? Say, rather, a race with healthy instincts and conscious energy, and the ready joyousness of youth—fittest rulers of a world where much hard work is to be done, where many things tend to melancholy, and all things to fatigue.

Boldero, as he rode homewards (only three miles out of his direct course) by the side of Maud's palanquin, through the pelting rain, admitted to himself an almost unlimited

capacity for happiness, of which he had till now been unaware.

There were some balls, moreover, when it did not rain; when the music, streaming out into the still atmosphere, could be heard miles away across the gorge, and the moon, sailing in a cloudless sky, flooded the mountain-sides with soft pure light. Such a night was that on which the 'Happy Bachelors' entertained their friends. Happy indeed! for the fairest hands in Elysium had been busy twining wreaths and arranging flowers, and ottomans and sofas and mirrors had been brought from many a despoiled drawing-room, in order that the Happy Bachelors' abode should be as picturesque and comfortable as hands could make it. Whole conservatories of lovely plants had been all the morning marching up the craggy path on coolies'

heads. All Elysium was alert, for the Bachelors were men of taste, 'well loved of many a noble dame;' and, if not otherwise fitted for the Episcopate, at any rate fulfilling the Apostolic requirement of being given to hospitality.

To one person, however, that ball was a period of the darkest disappointment. While the merriment of the evening was raging to its height poor Boldero's heart was growing colder and colder, and all his pleasant schemes were rapidly melting into air. The course of true love always runs delightfully smooth when one person only is concerned, and that person's imagination directs it at his will; but how often rude contact with reality brings all our airy castle-building to the ground! Boldero, in his dreams about Maud, had no doubt judged her charms

aright ; but he had omitted one important consideration, namely, that he was not the only man in the world, and that other people would be likely to think about her much as he did himself. This melancholy fact was now borne in upon him with a cruel vehemence. Maud seemed to be in the greatest request, and to smile with distracting impartiality on all who came about her. ‘Why did you not ask me sooner?’ she said, reproachfully, when he came to claim a dance. ‘My card has been full for ages. Stop—you shall have one of Mr. Desvœux’s ; he does not matter, and he has put down his name for several too many. Shall it be the fifteenth?’ Maud asked this in the most artless way, and seemingly without a suspicion that Boldero could be otherwise than pleased. Alas ! how far otherwise than

pleased he felt! The fifteenth! and then only a sort of crumb of consolation from Desvœux's over-ample banquet! How cruel for a man whose heart was beating high with hope, and who had risen to that state of nervous excitement when to propose would have been easier than not! The charmer had come and gone. The next moment Boldero saw her hurrying off with a new partner, and laughing just the same joyous, child-like laugh that had been ringing in his ears for weeks. 'What could that idiotic young ensign have said to make her laugh?' How could anyone laugh while Boldero found existence rapidly growing into a Sahara around him? What business had Maud to smile so affectionately on each new-comer? Then what was this intimacy with Desvœux which enabled her to treat him so uncer-



moniously? How came he to be putting down his name for what dances he pleased? Boldero moodily denounced her as a flirt of the purest water, and not over-particular in her selection of admirers. As for Desvœux, could any really nice girl like such a fop as that? Poor Boldero, in the amiable, sensible condition of mind which jealousy provokes, plunged at once into despair, felt too acutely miserable to dance, and resigned himself, a melancholy wallflower, to the contemplation of enjoyment in which fate forbade him to participate.

Presently Maud came back, and put every depreciatory thought about herself to instant flight. There had been some mistake about a quadrille, she said, and her partner was not forthcoming, and so she had taken flight at once. It was so dull dancing

with people one did not know ; and would it not be nice if it was the fashion to dance only with one's friends ? ' And now,' she said, ' do take me outside to look at the moon.' Maud was evidently bent on being kind and gracious ; and Boldero, blushing to think what an idiot he had been making of himself, took her out into the balcony, where the Bachelors' industry had worked wonders with ferns and flowers, and sofas poetically suggestive of a *tête-à-tête*, and all that an artistic Bachelor's soul dreams of as appropriate to balls. There lay the still valley at their feet—all its depths filled with motionless white clouds, that glistened in the moonlight like a silver lake. The twinkling fires of the hamlets opposite were one by one dying out of sight. The solemn pine-shade all around, wherever the moonlight could not

pierce, made the rest of the picture seem ablaze with glory. Is there a sweeter, softer radiance in the world than the moonlight of the Himalayas? 'This is enchanting,' Maud said, in great spirits; 'how I should like to sketch it! Why should we not have a moonlight party? And you will do my sketch for me, will you not, Mr. Boldero? Let me get Mr. Desvœux to arrange it; he is great at such things; and we can make him sing to us and play on his guitar, which he does delightfully, while we are drawing—would it not be delicious?' Boldero, in his heart, doubted the deliciousness of any programme in which Desvœux figured as a performer. He had no time to reply, however, for all too soon—before, as it seemed, he and his companion had well established themselves—the quadrille had ended, and Maud's

claimant for the next dance came bustling up; and Maud, who thought moonlight all very well, but would not have missed a valse for the world, went gleefully away, smiling her adorer a kind farewell that sent him sevenfold deeper into love than ever.

No proposal, it was clear enough, was destined to be made that night; but would the scheme look hopefuller to-morrow? Boldero lay tossing through the few hours which intervened before to-morrow, already reddening the eastern horizon, came, and could give himself no satisfactory reply. She liked him, certainly; but with how many was this precious privilege shared? He was one of the 'friends' with whom Maud liked to dance; but the list was so long, that all through a long evening he could with difficulty get near her for a minute. She

would come with him for a moonlight picnic ; but then Desvœux was to arrange it ; Sutton, no doubt, to preside ; and half-a-dozen more attendant courtiers to swell the little monarch's train. Boldero's manly bosom heaved with sighs. His servant, inexperienced in such symptoms, brought him, unbidden, a large beaker of iced soda-water, as if the flames of love could be extinguished by that innocent beverage.

Maud had, in fact, been very much impressed with Boldero, and, with the frankness of inexperience, had taken good care to let him know it. At this period of her career novelty possessed a wondrous charm, and the last admirer had a strong recommendation in being the last. Boldero forgot that at Elysium this fortunate advantage was no longer his. Still, Maud smiled

upon him, as she did on almost everyone who aspired to her smiles. It was not so much fickleness as the keen pleasure of success, the most natural and pleasantest, probably, of all human successes, the proved capacity to charm mankind. What faint adumbration of love had darkened the sunshine of her heart was all for Sutton; and even this was a sort of transient pang, which the excitement of daily life made it easy to forget. Knowing but faintly what love meant, she mistook, as women often do, the thrill of flattered vanity for solid feeling. Boldero had not disguised his admiration, nor Maud the pleasure which it gave her. Mutual satisfaction had been the natural result. Poor Boldero, who was always rushing at conclusions, and unskilled in the tactics of the feminine heart, thought himself at once

the happiest of men, and gilded his horizon with a bright aurora of matrimonial bliss. Maud, meanwhile, by a hundred half-unconscious arts, encouraged the delusion, and established the relation of friendly intimacy. When he looked across the room her bright eyes met his, and spoke him the heartiest recognition. She would look up wearily from some uncongenial companion, and find Boldero watching her, and a glance would sign the pledge of mutual understanding. 'Here is the song you liked,' she had said only the evening before, 'and I like it too ;' and then she had sung it, and each note had caught a new charm in being intended especially for his ear. So it was that Boldero had fallen into the too common mistake of impetuous lovers : he thought, poor mortal, that Maud had fallen violently

in love with him ; the truth being that she was merely rather pleased at the symptoms of his being violently in love with her, and accepted his homage with a light heart, as hardly more than her due.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## A BRUSH ON THE FRONTIER.

Tell me not, love, I am unkind,  
That from the nunnery  
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind  
To war and arms I fly.

THE reign of peace and pleasure was not destined to last through the summer undisturbed; conflicts more serious than those which were agitating poor Boldero's breast broke in upon the tranquil season, and caused a hurried dispersion of many of the holiday-makers.

For weeks past the news from the frontier had not been reassuring. Blunt had gone off on his mission to the Rumble

Chunder District, dragging the miserable Whisp, who could not ride, and hated leaving head-quarters, in his train. He had mastered the whole matter, as he considered, from first to last, and was resolved to bring his knowledge to bear with good effect upon the entanglements which his predecessors' ignorance and indistinctness had produced. He saw his way quite clearly, and was resolved to have it. Other people had faltered and hesitated; but Blunt was resolved to strike, and to strike hard, and to finish the matter and have done with it once for all. He arrived, accordingly, in no mood to be trifled with, as Mahomed Khan, the first of the Zamindars who had an interview with him, discovered in about two minutes. Now, Mahomed Khan, a wily old gentleman, with a great turn for diplomacy, was deeply

interested in the Rumble Chunder question, and had, at different times, interviewed a long succession of 'Sahibs' with reference to it. He had invariably found them long-suffering, conciliatory, anxious to learn, and not difficult to puzzle. He had talked to them at ease in his own language, and was accustomed to the elaborate courtesy due to the leader of a powerful and not over-loyal clan. When Sutton was getting his troop together in the Mutiny a word from Mahomed Khan would have put the whole district in a blaze, and rendered it impossible to recruit a man. The respect, however, which one good soldier feels for another had carried the day. The old fellow had ridden with fifty followers into Sutton's camp, unstrapped his sword, and, placing it in Sutton's hands, had sworn that he and his

would follow him wherever he pleased to lead them. Well had the oath been kept; and when some months later the fighting closed, Mahomed Khan's name was recorded as amongst the most deserving of Her Majesty's lieges, and his well-timed loyalty had resulted in a fine grant of fat acres, a conspicuous seat in the Durbar, and, not least in the estimation of men keenly sensitive to honour, a vast deal of complimentary writing and talking on the part of every British official with whom he had to deal. All this flattery had, perhaps, turned the old soldier's head, or, at any rate, had given him no small idea of his importance to the British 'Ráj,' and of his claims to the gratitude of British administrators. His rights in the Salt matter had been left in convenient obscurity, and might, not without reason, be considered as

tacitly conceded by the Power with whom he was on such affectionate terms.

This, however, was not at all the light in which Blunt saw the matter ; he was annoyed at the man's bluster, pomposity, and pretence. He was not in the least impressed by a well-worn packet of letters which his visitor produced, in which successive generals and commissioners had testified to his deserts ; what he wanted was business, and this was essentially unbusiness-like. If Sutton had written, ' You have proved yourself a brave and loyal soldier, and I will ever be your friend,' this was no reason why Mahomed Khan should not pay his salt-dues like other folk, or should object to have his title-deeds rigidly overhauled.

' If it was just, why had Sir John Larrens Sahib never done it ? ' the old

man objected; but Blunt did not care what Sir John Lawrence had done or had not done; what he wanted was his bond, and nothing else would satisfy him. This was Blunt's first nettle, and he was grasping it firmly, with no doubts as to the propriety of the course. Then, at last, he got tired of the interview, and—fatal blunder for an Eastern diplomat—became abrupt and rude, and began to show his hand. Thereupon Mahomed Khan began to show his teeth, and went away in a surly mood, with the news, which spread like wildfire among the clansmen, that the Sirkar was going to rule them with a heavy hand; that all old rights were to be cancelled, a grievous land-tax to be imposed, and that a terrible 'Sahib,' of fierce aspect, had arrived to see this objectionable policy carried out.

Then Blunt found the investigation by no means the simple matter he had hoped. Statements which looked so neat and clean when submitted to the Board, and neatly minuted on by Whisp, assumed an aspect of hopeless inexplicability when Blunt had them face to face ; and the more he questioned the less he understood. He was armed with powers to examine witnesses, but not a word of truth could be got out of anyone. Five old countrymen, whose noble bearing, well-chiselled features, and long flowing beards would have made a fortune in a Roman studio, came before him, and told him the most unblushing lies with a volubility that fairly staggered Blunt's bewildered comprehension.

To say one thing to-day, the precise opposite to-morrow, and to explain with easy

grace that it was a mistake, or that the evidence had been wrongly taken down, seemed to every man whom Blunt interrogated the correct and natural procedure for a person who was being pressed for information which it was inconvenient to produce. Some men remembered everything, others professed the most absolute obliviousness—each contradicted all the rest, except when Government interests were concerned, and thus all swore together like a band of conspirators. Then the accounts were kept on a system which none of the Salt Board people understood, and which no one else could be induced to explain.

Then, by some fatality, the white ants had always eaten the precise documents of which Blunt stood in need, and the trembling officials produced a tattered mass of dirt and



rags, and assured him that this was the record which he called for, or rather all that could be found of its remains. Blunt became, day by day, more profoundly convinced that all men—all the Rumble Chunder men, at any rate—were liars, and let his conviction appear in short speeches and abrupt procedure. The old Zamindars, outraged by discourtesy in the presence of their retainers, came away from his presence quivering with rage, and ripe for the first chance of mischief which offered. Blunt found the nettle stinging him sorely, and, like a rough, resolute man, grasped it with all the more unflinching hand. When at last he succeeded in making out a case he dealt out the sternest justice, not, perhaps, without a gratified vindictiveness against the people who had so long baffled and annoyed him. One Uzuf Ali,

a large grantee, had been called upon to verify his claims; and this he proceeded to do with the utmost alacrity. He and his forefathers, he protested, had been in possession for centuries—look at the Revenue records, the files of the Courts, the orders of Government. Here, too, was a sunnud from the Emperor Akbar confirming them in their rights. Twenty witnesses, all disinterested, honourable, unimpeachable, the entire village, indeed, would attest the fact of continuous, open, rightful enjoyment from a period as far as memory could go. So the twenty witnesses did; but then appeared a gentleman, one Hosain Khan, on the other side, and blew the pretty story into the air. Usuf Ali was an audacious impostor; everybody in the country knew that his father had come from Delhi not thirty years ago; he had no more right to an ounce of salt than

the 'Commissioner Sahib' himself; the ground over which he claimed his rights was notoriously in the possession of another man. As for the sunnud of Akbar, it was an obvious forgery, as the Commissioner Sahib might see for himself by merely looking.

Hosain Khan having had his innings, Uzuf Ali returned to the wickets, and began to make great play. 'Ask Hosain Khan,' he said, 'if his uncle did not carry off my sister, and if some of our people did not kill him for it?'

'Yes,' says Hosain Khan, 'you stabbed him yourself, like a coward as you are, when he lay asleep by his bullocks.'

'And if I did,' cries his opponent, 'did not your father knock out my cousin's brains with a bathee (club), and get sent over the Kala Panee (black water) for his pains?'

The controversy waxed ardent ; the combatants' voices rose shrill and high ; they tossed their black locks, and waved their arms, and poured out long streams of passionate family history, long-cherished feuds—deep, never-to-be-forgotten wrongs — interminable complications as to lands and wells, women and bullocks ; and Blunt, who understood nothing but that they had travelled a long way from the Rumble Chunder Grant, sat by in mute and wrathful despair, and began to perceive that the administration of justice to folks so excitable and unveracious as these was no such easy matter as he had once imagined.

Amid all the chaff, however, Blunt had, he thought, got hold of one piece of solid fact : either the sunnud was a forgery or it was not ; and if a forgery, then he resolved to make an example, prosecute Uzuf Ali for

his fraud, and turn him summarily out of his pretended rights. A forgery no doubt it was, for the paper bore the British watermark, and you could see the places where the gunpowder had been smeared in hopes of giving it an antiquated look. And so the question was decided, and the order made out, and poor Uzuf Ali, in vain protesting that it was a device of the enemy, left the Commissioner's presence a ruined man.

Ruined men, however, are dangerous things at all times, and especially with an excitable and easily frightened people, who see in their neighbours' fall only an anticipation of their own. The Bazaar was presently in a tumult—angry clusters of talkers gathered in circles round the grain-shops or at the village well or under the great banyan-tree which spread a wide shade over one end of the

street, and discussed past grievances and future disaster. Meanwhile Blunt, not with so light a heart or seeing his way as clearly as usual, had moved his head-quarters a dozen miles away, and begun a new series of investigations with a new set of Hosain Khans and Uzuf Alis, and with precisely similar success.

Before the month was over Fotheringham's words had come true. The Eusuf Khayls were up—a police outpost had been attacked in force one night, and its occupants had made a bad retreat, leaving two of their number on the field. The marauders had ridden through twenty miles of British territory, burning villages, destroying crops, driving away bullocks to their fastnesses in the hills. Blunt, as he came, escorted by a strong detachment into Dustypore, met the Horse Artillery rattling out towards the dis-

turbed region ; and a telegram despatched to Elysium informed Sutton that he was to head a flying column into the enemies' country, and that he must be with his regiment without an instant's delay.

## CHAPTER XX.

## A LAST RIDE.

He turned his charger as he spoke  
Upon the river-shore ;  
He gave the bridle-reins a shake,  
Said ' Adieu for evermore,  
My love !  
And adieu for evermore !'

SUTTON, who was practising *La ci darem la mano* with Maud when the telegram arrived, glanced at its contents without stopping the duet, and slipped it into his pocket before Maud had even seen it. *Andiam, Andiam, Andiam, Andiam*, she sang joyfully ; *Andiam, Andiam, Andiam, Andiam* pealed Sutton's pleasant tenor tones, and so the performance came smoothly to its close. ' And now,' Sutton said, ' I am



afraid we must stop our practice for this morning, as I have to go to the Viceroy; and I will come and see you on my way back. I may have to go down to Dustypore this afternoon.'

'Down to Dustypore!' Maud cried, in a tone that bespoke the pang of disappointment that shot into her heart. 'We hoped you would stay all the summer.'

'And so did I,' said her companion; 'but unluckily some of my naughty boys on the hills out there have been getting into too good spirits, and I must go and look after them. And now for his Excellency.'

Before Sutton had been gone many minutes Desvœux came galloping up the pathway, and found Maud still standing in the verandah, where she had wished Sutton farewell, and where in truth she had been

standing in a brown study ever since he went. Desvœux was in the gloomiest spirits, and too much concerned about himself to pay much attention to Maud's troubled looks. 'Have you heard the dreadful, dreadful news?' he said. 'All our holidays are over for the year. There has been an outbreak on the frontier. The troops are already on the march. The Agent is closeted with the Viceroy, and goes down this afternoon, and of course poor I have to go along with him. Sutton is to command the expedition, and, I dare say, is off already. Every soldier in the place will be ordered down; and meanwhile what is to become of the fancy-ball?'

'And the moonlight picnic?' cried Maud, suddenly conscious of the necessity of concealing a feeling which she would not for

the world have had Desvœux suspect, namely, that Sutton's absence would be to her a calamity which would go far to render balls and picnics alike a matter of indifference.

'Yes,' Desvœux said, with bitter vehemence; 'life is sometimes too unendurably disagreeable, and things go so provokingly as one does not want them. And we were just having such a happy time! And then, I suppose, to make our farewell the sadder, you have chosen this morning to look your loveliest. As for me, the only bits of life I care about any longer are those I spend with you.'

'And with Mrs. Vereker,' cried Maud. 'Come, Mr. Desvœux, confess, now, have you not been there just this minute saying the

very same thing to her? I'll ask her this afternoon, and we will compare notes as to our adieux !'

'Profane idea !' said Desvœux. 'But you are always mocking. You know I care a great deal more about you than you do about me.'

'Impossible,' cried Maud. 'Did I not tell you just now that I was broken-hearted about the picnic? I meant to sit by the waterfall and make you sing us "Spirito Gentil," in the moonlight. It is a cruel disappointment.'

'You are very unkind, and very heartless,' said Desvœux, in no mood for banter.

'Come, come,' said Maud, 'do not be cross; we will not quarrel just as we are parting.'

'Well, then, be serious.'

‘I am serious,’ said the other; ‘and, seriously, I am sorry that we are to lose you. Poor fellow!’

‘Give a poor fellow a present,’ said Desvœux, beseechingly; ‘that cherry riband that binds the loveliest neck in the world.’

‘No, I won’t,’ said Maud; ‘it cost me two rupees only the day before yesterday. There, you may have this rose. Take it, take it, and remember——’

‘You are enough to drive a fellow mad,’ said Desvœux. ‘Who will be the lucky man to find out where your heart is, and whether you have got one?’

Then Desvœux cantered off, and Maud retired to her bedroom, locked herself in, threw herself on a couch, and indulged in the unusual luxury of a thoroughly good cry. Sutton, quite unconsciously, had made

great advances in the occupation of her heart. He had been constantly with her and Felicia ; and the more Maud saw of other people, the more convinced she became that he was the paragon of men, and with him the only chance of happiness for her. And now he would come back presently, Maud knew, and say a kind, feeling farewell to Felicia, and a word or two of politeness to her, and go away on his expedition, and take all the sunshine of existence with him, and never have a suspicion of the aching heart he left behind, and of the treasure of devotion waiting for him if he chose to have it. Surely there must be something wrong in the constitution of a world where such woes could come to pass !

So while Desvœux, in a sort of half-rage,

was hustling his pony down the hillside as if he really did mean to break his neck once for all and have done with a life in which Maud could not continually figure, Maud herself was in affliction for quite another cause; and Sutton, his heart too full of warlike schemes to think of love, was busy with a map spread out on the Viceroy's table, pointing out exactly the route through the hills which the expedition was to take. Sutton and the Viceroy were the best of friends. They had ridden and shot and slaughtered tigers and bears in each other's company, and each knew and liked the other as a daring, enthusiastic, and thoroughgoing sportsman. The Viceroy, himself no mean performer, had seen Sutton dispose of a big boar, turned to bay, on more than one occasion, in a way which had filled him with

admiration and delight; and when, in rare intervals of business, the Ruler of India allowed himself a day's holiday for a walk through the forest in search of bears or jungle-pheasant, no more favourite companion than Sutton ever helped to fill the bag. Each trusted the other thoroughly, and the Viceroy now spoke of the expedition with a cheerful confidence indicative of his conviction that it was in the proper hands. The main plans had been actually settled. The force was to be pushed on as far into the hills as was practicable. Two strong mule-batteries were provided to keep the mountain-sides clear of a hovering enemy. When they reached the high-table, which lay beyond, a dash was to be made at a village where one of the rebellious tribes was known to be entrenched in force; and when this was



seized and destroyed, and the rebels for the time dispersed, the little army was to be encamped for a few weeks, by way of demonstration of military power to the refractory mountaineers. 'Good bye, Sutton,' said the Viceroy, 'and good luck to you and speedy return.' And then, as he went out, kind ladies met him in the hall and wished him a fresh farewell ; and Sutton went away, in a glow of excitement and pleasure, to make his preparations for the afternoon's gallop, unconscious of all the sentiment in another person's heart which his departure was stirring into life. He would be gone a fortnight or three weeks, and was, in truth, not sorry for an excuse for a return to his dear soldiers after a month's idleness and holiday-making.

When he came to the Vernons', an hour

later, he found Maud's pony at the door, and herself ready-equipped.

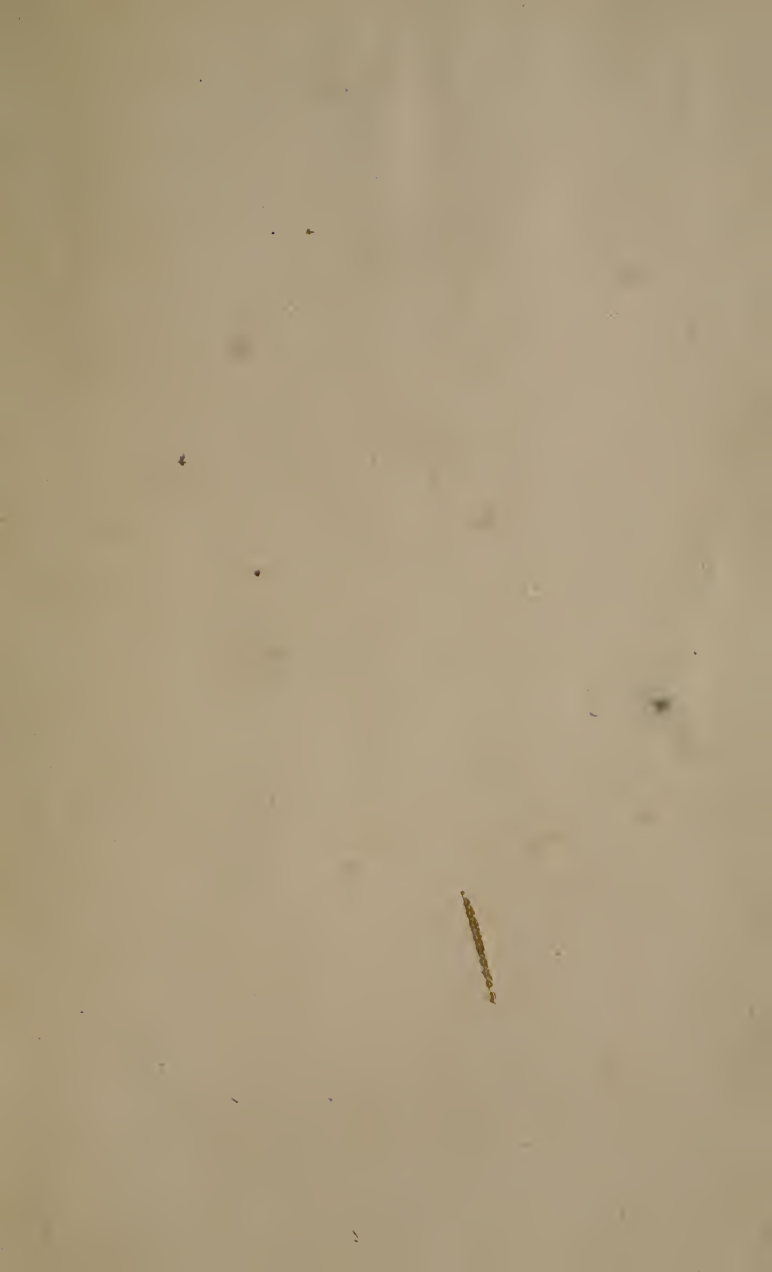
'Would you like a companion for the first stage of your journey?' Felicia said. 'If so, Maud will ride with you, and the children and I will start later, and meet her on the way home.' This was, in fact, a kind device of Felicia's—one of the rash things which people do when they are completely perplexed, in a sort of wild hope that some good may come of it, rather than with any precise design. Felicia had come with distressing distinctness to recognise the full gravity of the position, and to feel how dreadfully she had been to blame. She had done all that one woman can to lead another to fall in love, and she had succeeded only too well. Her little scheme of happiness for her two friends was marred by an impedi-

ment which she had altogether overlooked. Sutton's obduracy had never occurred to her as a serious impediment, yet now he seemed hopelessly incomprehensible. Bitterly Felicia reproached herself for all her part in the proceeding; but of what use was self-reproach? There was the terrible result, beyond the reach alike of penitence or redress. Maud's heart, Felicia knew instinctively, was lost—her very silence on the topic betrayed the consciousness of something to conceal. There was a sort of entreating air about her that seemed to cry for pity. More than once Felicia had taken her to her arms and embraced her tenderly—she could not have said why, but yet she knew. Maud, with her joyousness gone, and battling with a silent sorrow, seemed to her to have a touch of pathos which roused

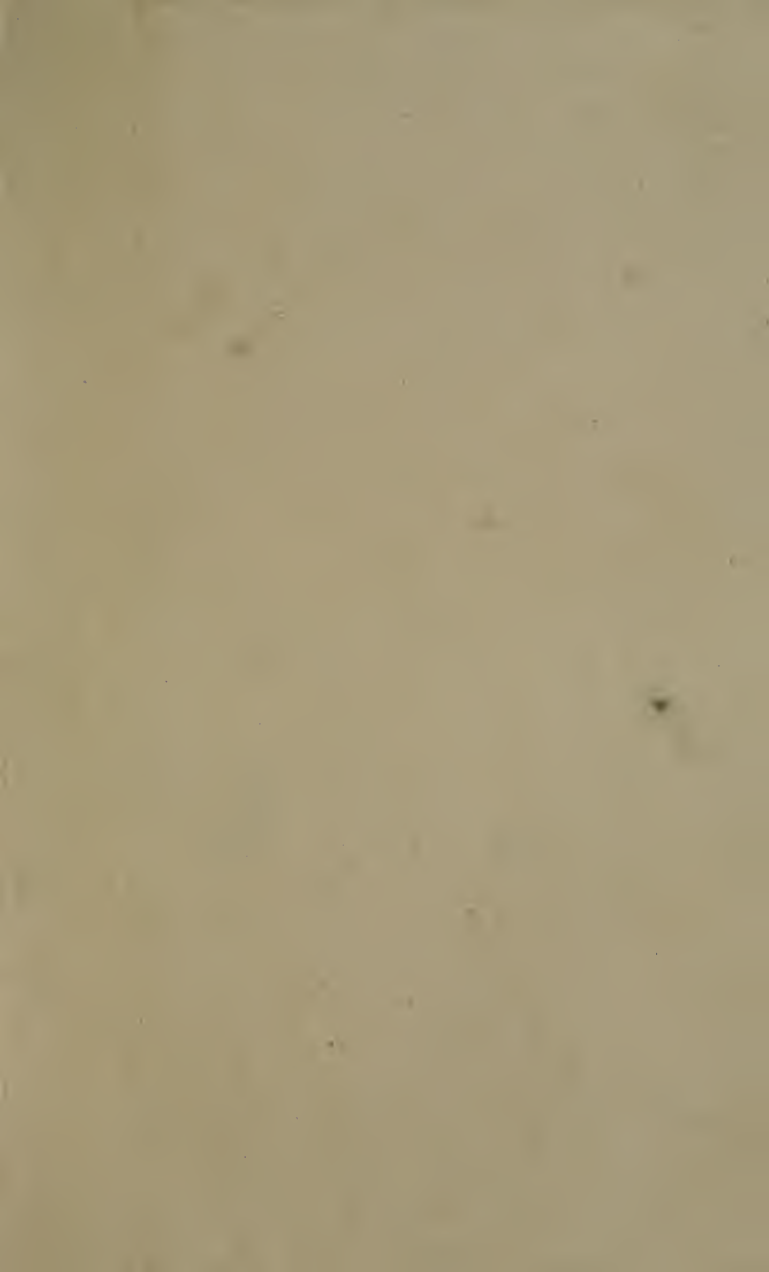
all the latent melancholy of Felicia's nature into activity. It was one of those sad things in life before which her fortitude completely failed. Ruefully did she vow, now that vowing was of no use, that her first attempt at match-making should be her last. At any rate, she sent the two riders off together on this last ride, in the faint hope that something might occur to bring the tardy wooer to a right frame of mind.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY  
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE  
AND PARLIAMENT STREET







UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 041775542